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FEMALE LIFE IN PRISON.

BY

A PRISON MATRON.

Second Edition, Revised.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Dedication.

TO

CAPTAIN D. O'BRIEN,

DIRECTOR OF HER MAJESTY'S CONVICT PRISONS.

SIR,—I cannot forbear inscribing on this page a name dear to all prison officers—a name that suggests many reminiscences of kindness, consideration, and untiring interest in prisoners and matrons. That I have written very earnestly—to the utmost of my power, very truthfully—a record of prison life, I trust may form my excuse for dedicating this work to you.

Much that may appear strange herein, I pray you to believe, is devoid of all exaggeration—much that might have been more highly-coloured and effective, through the agency of fiction, is related after the simple manner of its occurrence.

I cannot expect that all I have said—all that I have written—will please you and your honourable co-operators; but I am convinced you will not prejudge my work before perusal, or think that any assertions therein are written hastily, or without sufficient justification on my part.

In a fair spirit I have ventured here and there to criticize—in a fair spirit you will estimate my woman's pleading; and whether you may consider me wrong or right, warranted or not, in laying these papers before the public, I trust you will believe I venture to dedicate this book in gratitude to one who possesses the true feelings of a gentleman and the heart of a Christian.

Believe me, Sir,

Your faithful and humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

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FEMALE LIFE IN PRISON.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

I WISH it to be clearly understood that these are the honest reminiscences of one retired from Government service—that many years of prison experience enable me to offer my readers a fair statement of life and adventure at Brixton and Millbank prisons, and afford me the opportunity of attempting to convey some faint impression of the strange hearts that beat—perhaps break, a few of them—

within the high walls between them and general society. I am anxious to set about this task earnestly, and in a good spirit—I will "nothing extenuate;" I have no reason to "set down aught in malice." I have the party-feelings of no clique to satisfy, no personal wrongs to seek to vindicate, and I am confident that the relation of these prison incidents can do no harm, and may, by God's help, effect some little good. For I am not alone in my conviction that these stories of erring and mistaken women—fallen sisters, but still sisters, whom we have no right to cast aside or shrink away from—do in many cases prove that there is no estate so low but that the elements of the better nature are existent, and still struggling for the light. If I have no permission to make these papers public, it is simply for the reason that I have not sought it; my own impression of these documents, after a careful re-perusal of the same, is, that there is not a line that I shall in after years regret that I have written, or that the directors of Government prisons will, after due consideration, think I was not justified in publishing. I have a few protests to make against

prison rules and discipline; I have only one appeal to urge in its proper place on behalf of my own hard-worked class; I am not a woman with a mission or a grievance. From directors, governors, deputy-governors, chaplains, and lady-superintendents, the prison matrons, as a body, have nothing to complain of, and much kindness, and sympathy, and good feeling to be thankful for, in the midst of the constant trial to their physical and mental powers.

I believe I offer, for the first time, a true and impartial chronicle of female prison life; the mystery that has so long surrounded it, the official over-caution, there is no occasion for. The world is anxious to know, and has a right to know, the doings of its unfortunate and its misguided atoms; —shut from the society whose laws our prisoners have outraged, they are not shut out from public interest, or the prayers of honest men and women.

Whether I am fitted for the task, or have undertaken too much for my woman's strength—whether I have said too much or too little—that world will fairly judge me in good time.

In those details of prison life which I am about

to lay before the reader, I shall seldom keep to the anonymous. In those cases where the feelings of prisoners who have been discharged, and are, perhaps, attempting a new life, might be pained by the introduction of their names herein, I have, of course, forborne publicity, and contented myself with fictitious cognomens; but where the truth reflects credit on the woman whose name may at present be associated with all that is vile — or where the truth with respect to some dark natures has no power to harm—or where some characters well known to the public, through the medium of the newspapers, pass again across these troubled pages—I have not scrupled to give real names and dates. I shall be attaining my own ends, and offering a greater pledge of my veracity, by such a course. Prisoners I would no more intentionally pain than prison-officers; but from a suspicion of mere book-making, I am anxious, even at so early a stage, to disabuse the public mind.

To avoid book-making, therefore, I shall pass very lightly over the ground trodden by former writers on this subject. I shall not enter into any lengthy descriptions of the prisons themselves; I

will not forget the old copy-book admonition, "Avoid vain repetitions." My task, as I have already intimated, is to describe the life within the cells, not to write a history of the cells themselves; the incidents that evolve from prison duties, not the mere routine which those duties are.

And though the woof may be dark enough—for it is a story of dark places, and of the children of night—yet there will pass across its texture threads of a lighter hue. Prison matrons and prisoners have opportunities occasionally for smiling; and as the sublime, we are told, verges upon the ridiculous, so on the steps of tragedy—the faltering, shadowy steps of the tragedy of crime—a little gleam of light falls here and there. It does not follow that the criminal nature of the deed which has brought upon the actors many years of penal servitude, adds a shade more deep or a despair more utter to the strange outcasts and pariahs of whom this book will treat. There are women in our many prisons mourning over petty thefts, but there are murderesses to all outward appearance defiant, cheerful, and even *light-hearted.*

In conclusion, and as my chief reason for writ-

ing this work, let me state that it is the humble officers of our female convict prisons that have the greatest—nay, the only—opportunity of estimating the true character of those whom they may have in charge. Directors may issue their annual reports, the governors of prisons may write their ponderous tomes upon the question, the chaplains may preach, and pray, and visit, but their opportunities of judging fairly and honestly are few and far between, and they are misled and deceived every week in the year. In men's prisons I believe it is the warder, and in female prisons I am convinced it is the matron, who alone have the power to offer a true picture of prison life. The matrons are in constant communion with the prisoners; seeing them not for a few minutes each in a daily or weekly inspection, but passing their lives in their midst; witnessing each minute some little slip of the mask which on visiting days the more cunning keep before their feelings; and often remarking some weakness, or passionate outburst, or wail over the past, or little trait of character that speaks of the old and better times, which it is not part of a matron's duty to report.

For a matron's duty is to report only offences against discipline; and even where the offence is trivial, much is looked over, and by some gentle-hearted prison authorities expected to be looked over, which even prison rules do not strictly countenance. And of that better side to prison character which a matron has the greatest chance of observing, of that evidence of affection for some kind officer who has screened offenders from a trivial punishment, or has listened to some little story, in impulsive moments, about a mother, sister, brother, or child they loved once, the great report books utter not a word.

The report books bristle with statistics, as the prison books with sins of omission; Government can tell to a fraction the expenses of these large convict establishments—to a sailor's shirt or a door-mat the amount of work performed in six months—to a man or woman the number who attend chapel, or receive the sacrament, or are confirmed by my Lord Bishop—but of the life within the outward life that Blue Books speak of, and concerning which Parliament debates, there are no records kept.

With a hope of supplying that void in my own humble fashion, of adding my scraps of information, gathered by a little observation and no small experience, I have compiled this book. To those who would review it, I assert a right to consider this work as a simple statement of much that has happened in our Government establishments during the last nine years. I offer no excuse for that want of literary ability to put in their proper form —or rather in their most attractive form—those details which follow the present chapter. I trust I have the power to express clearly those thoughts which I wish to convey to the reader; and as to the artistic treatment of this work, I am by no means anxious concerning it. I do not ask for any favour from my critics; I merely respectfully suggest that it is the matter, not the style, of the work, which deserves their chief consideration, and that I have done my best to make that matter readable.

It is a faint record of that inner life to which I have recently alluded. I have not attempted to probe too deeply into the strange workings of it, to see always sorrow and repentance therein, or to

doubt in all cases the truth and honesty of those under lock and key. I have expressed my own convictions, often related my story and left the comments thereon to my reader—I am in many cases still perplexed as to the right motives and the true nature of those whose history I am about to relate. There is but one Book that can fully reveal the awful mystery of such lives, that will one day tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!

CHAPTER II.

A PRISONER'S RECEPTION.

THE most fitting commencement of my work will be to afford the reader some little idea of the manner in which a prisoner is received at Millbank Prison.

Millbank Prison, or Millbank Penitentiary, needs no very long description in this place—it has been already described by a more skilful hand, and there are few of my readers who are not aware that it is situated on the Middlesex side of

the river Thames, and that it is a prison for male and female convicts.

In charge of the female compartment are assistant matrons on probation, assistant matrons, reception-matron, principal matrons, latterly a chief matron—on whom the practical working of the prison really devolves, but to whom the credit is not invariably given—a lady-superintendent, a deputy-governor, and a governor.*

The arrival of female prisoners at Millbank is unfortunately almost an every-day occurrence—the great sea of crime is never still, and its waves are ever breaking against the grim front of our penitentiary. When prisoners are not arriving from the county gaols—from Gloucester, York, Stafford, &c.—they are coming direct from the Central Criminal Court, &c., with the sentence of the judge still ringing in their ears; or back from Fulham Refuge and Brixton Prison, where they have insulted officers or set the rules of dis-

* Since writing the above, the governor and deputy-governor of Millbank Prison have ceased to exercise any control in the working of the female portion of the prison. The sole superintendence is now vested in Mrs. Gibson, a thoughtful and energetic lady.

cipline at defiance, and so are returned to Millbank, where there is little association, a stricter silence, and work more hard.

Of the prisoners who make their first appearance on this sombre stage, I desire to speak in this place.

The outer bell is rung, the gate-keeper unlocks and swings open the great gates, inner grated gates of iron work are unfastened by second gate-keepers, and the cab or omnibus, or prison van, passes through to the door of the reception-room, where a matron is ready to hear from the custodian of the woman or women he or she may have brought, the name, age, nature of the crime, and length of the sentence —all of which being duly entered in the register, the new arrivals are formally delivered over to the Millbank authorities.

The first inexorable rule to which the new prisoner has to submit, and which is a trial that is always the hardest to bear, is that of having the hair cut. With a woman new to the rules, a comer who has not sat in that room before, with the scissors of Atropos snipping round her head, this operation is seldom performed without a remon-

strance. Women whose hearts have not quailed, perhaps, at the murder of their infants, or the poisoning of their husbands, clasp their hands in horror at this sacrifice of their natural adornment —weep, beg, pray, occasionally assume a defiant attitude, resist to the last, and are finally overcome only by force. It is one of the most painful tasks of the prison, this hair-cutting operation— moreover, it is, in my own opinion at least, a test of character.

One woman will be resigned to her fate on the instant, and, with a Socratic stoicism, will compress her lips, submit herself to the shears, and march away to her bath afterwards in a business-like manner. A second will have a shivering fit over it, a third will weep passionately, and a fourth will pray to be spared the indignity, and implore the matron on her knees to go to the lady-superintendent and state her case for her.

Some women are impressed with the idea that coaxing will go a long way towards softening the matron's heart, or at least obtain some relaxation of the rule, and permission to retain a greater length

of hair on their heads; and consequently bestow many "my dears" and "God bless you's" on the operator.

The greatest trouble in my experience of prison life was with an old woman of sixty years of age, and with about the same number of grey hairs on her head. She was an old prison-bird—had spent two-thirds of her life in confinement, and was as vain of her personal appearance as any girl of seventeen.

"No, Miss B.," she said to the operator, after catching sight of the scissors, and drawing herself up with the haughtiness of a duchess—"not this time, if you please, Miss B. It can't be done."

But Miss B. replied it could be done, and was absolutely necessary to be done before the prisoner left the room.

"Things have altered a little, Miss B., since I saw you last, I can assure you. You've no power to touch a hair of my head, mum."

"How's that?"

"If you please, mum, I'm married," and the old woman regarded the matron with undisguised triumph.

"And what's that to do with it?—sit down—you really must sit down."

"What's that to do with it!" shrieked the old woman, indignantly; "*why, it's my husband's hair now*, and you daren't touch it, according to law. It belongs to my husband, not to me, and you've no right to touch it. Lord bless you, the Queen of England daren't lay a finger on it now!"

And the old woman's staunch faith in the laws of her country to protect her grey hairs, would in any other place, under other circumstances, have been supremely ludicrous. Argument with her was useless—she did not see that anything more was required after an expression of her opinion—she would not object to the bath, because the law had nothing to say in the matter of baths to married women, but her hair couldn't be touched by any mortal power. When she saw that the matron was totally uninfluenced by her eloquent expositions, she demanded to see the governor—he knew the law of England, of course; and when her hair was cut to the statutable length, she vowed to make a full statement of the case to the directors, on the

next board meeting, and please put her name down to see those directors at once. Such an infamous violation of the laws of her country she had never been a witness to in her time!

And strange as it may appear, the plea of marriage has latterly been very often urged by prisoners under the same circumstance. "It's their husband's hair" has now become a constant reason why the rules of the prison should be waived in their particular cases. And when it is not urged as a plea, women, whom a repetition of crime has brought back to the old quarters, generally offer, as their first piece of information, that they have been married since their last incarceration. There is a peculiar craving to be considered an "honest married woman," and the husband, more often than otherwise, is alleged to be in the army—probably out of compliment to the military character of the governor and his deputy.

There have been times, as I have already indirectly mentioned, when some woman, resisting all idea of discipline, will stoutly maintain her determination not to have her hair cut. One woman, if my memory does not fail me, from

Stafford gaol, persisted in scoffing at all persuasive efforts of the matron, and replying thereto by a torrent of vituperation. She was a tall, powerful woman, with the face of a tigress and the limbs of an athlete; and one glance was sufficient to convince the matrons in attendance that it was beyond their power to master her. On such occasions the guards on duty in the outer yards, or in the men's prison, are summoned to put the handcuffs on, while the necessary ceremony is gone through. In this case it required three men to secure her wrist whilst her hair was cut the requisite length, she struggling, and cursing, and swearing long after the operation was over—even when she was in her refractory cell, while the gas was burning feebly in the wards, the matron on night duty gliding noiselessly along the passages, and the clock in the yard chiming the early hours of morning.

I can remember one prisoner delirious for a day and a night after the operation—the mortification of "losing her hair," or the impression made upon a nature more highly sensitive than ordinary, tending to that unfrequent result.

She was a young, fair Scotch girl, and her "Dinna cut my hair—oh! dinna cut my hair!" rang along the deserted corridors with a plaintive earnestness.

Still in reality it is not a barbarous ceremony; it is essentially necessary for cleanliness, and the hair is not cut to an ungraceful shortness. But the impression left upon the prisoner's mind is not a pleasant one, and I am inclined to think that there are really a few who are more sullen, more doggedly obstinate, or more ferocious, according to their respective natures, from the moment they see their locks of hair strewing the floor of the reception-room.

Woman's vanity, that regard for personal appearance which is inherent in most of us, I suppose, does not grow less within a prison; at a more advanced stage, I shall be enabled to offer many curious illustrations of prisoners' vanity, under difficulties which may be readily imagined.

A registry of name, a shortening of hair, a tepid bath, a change from the dress in which they are received to the brown serge, blue check apron, and

muslin cap of prison uniform, the key turned upon a cell in "the solitary ward," and "one more unfortunate" is added to the list.

CHAPTER III.

A DAY'S ROUTINE.

A DAY'S routine in Millbank Prison will eventually save me and the reader much troublesome iteration. It will afford a glimpse of the life that goes on day after day, year after year, there; that every-day, toilsome, wearisome life which women by their own misdeeds have brought upon themselves. Taken as a class, female prisoners are not unhappy under the monotony; the liberty of passing to the outer world excepted, they are better off than those women consigned to the tender mercies of the poor-law guard-

ians. They are more cared for, their health is more scrupulously regarded, their food is better, their taskmasters are—if we may believe the cruel reports which shame us as Christians and fellow-men and women—more considerate and kind.

Some day, when the Government takes the case in hand, and workhouses as well as prisons are under its surveillance, so "odious" a comparison may not be drawn; but sad and certain it is that there are, in prison, advantages which are denied to the honest working-classes who have come at last to the "House." Two instances of a steady, persistent course of sin in women who preferred a prison and prison treatment to the workhouse, I shall be enabled to offer in their proper place.

The day at Millbank begins at a quarter to six; the guard going off night duty in the yards rings up the prison, and by six o'clock every prisoner is expected to be dressed and standing in her cell, ready to show herself to the matrons on duty in the wards.

At six o'clock the matrons and assistant-matrons pass down the wards, unbolt each inner door, and

fling it back, to make sure the prisoner is safe and in health. The cells at Millbank Prison are furnished with two doors,* the outer one formed of an iron grating, through which the matron passes her arm to unbolt the inner. As a rule they are both secured at night; in exceptional cases the inner one is left open, if the prisoner's health be delicate, or the surgeon or physician doubt the ventilation of the cell. The rattle, rattle of the bolts down the ward has a peculiar effect, and is the first sign of daily life. By that time the matron who has been on night duty has reported everything quiet, or called attention to the fact that there has been a "break out" in the night,—a noisy woman carried to the dark by the guards who have been brought in for that purpose,—a sudden illness, or the like. Life begins; a certain number of women are let out to clean the flagstones in the wards, with a matron as guard over them; a few of the best-behaved dust the matrons' rooms, and make their beds. The cells by this time are all cleaned and tidied,

* At Brixton Prison there is but one iron door to each cell.

the bed is carefully folded up, the blankets, rug, shawl, and woman's bonnet placed thereon, the deal table polished, and the stones of the cell scrubbed.

At half-past seven o'clock the cocoa is carried by one of the women to each cell, and a pint of that liquid meted out for the prisoner, by a matron in attendance, together with a four-ounce loaf. Their breakfast finished, and the tin pint scrubbed and polished by the prisoner, who retains it in her cell, the work of the day begins: the coir-picking for the new comers, or women who have not passed their probation stage, the bag-making, the making of shirts for the male prisoners, etc., etc. This work at Millbank is carried on by each woman in her separate cell, working silently, passively, and allowed no converse with her fellow-prisoners. At Brixton, where the rule is less stringent,—and where women, whose general conduct for ten months at Millbank has been sufficiently good, are removed,—the work is carried on by two in association in the old prison cells, and in the wing, which portion of the prison is also used as a place of exercise for the women

when the wet weather prevents the "airing grounds" being used.

At a quarter past nine the chapel bell at Millbank rings the prisoners to the morning service at a quarter to ten—each matron in charge of a ward being responsible for the number of women attending chapel, and the safe return to their cells after the service is over.* At half-past twelve o'clock, water is served to the prisoners. At a quarter to one o'clock the dinner-bell is rung, and each prisoner provided with four ounces of boiled meat, half a pound of potatoes, and a six-ounce loaf. After dinner the cans are collected, and coir-picking, shirt-making, &c., proceed as before, only the voices of the matrons breaking the stillness of the prison. One hour each day at Millbank is allowed for exercise in the airing yards, where the silent system is still enforced. A ward of women is exercised at a time, with a prison matron in attendance. The prisoners walk in Indian file round and round the yard, the matron keeping a

* At Brixton Prison there is also an afternoon service, which at Millbank is devoted to the male portion of the penitentiary.

careful watch on her flock of black sheep. This occupation of the prison matron is one of the most tedious and monotonous of her daily life—shivering in her bear-skin cloak during the winter months, and struggling against the heat in the summer.

For one hour these convicted women tramp unceasingly round the gravelled yard, muttering to each other when at the farthest distance from the matron in attendance, and passing her with demure looks, as though a thought of whispering in defiance of rules had never crossed their minds—plodding on in this mill-horse round for sixty minutes, with the matron at times nodding at her post. I remember once, in the days of my hard service—and that it is a very hard service the next chapter will do its best to prove—falling asleep over my charge, and going far away in my dreams to the friends who were away from me in the country home I had quitted for that prison service. It was in the summer months, and there had been a restless time of it at Millbank—prisoners more obdurate, rash, and defiant, and therefore devolving on prison matrons harder work and

increased anxiety. Naturally, and very properly, an officer asleep at her post is liable to suspension from duty and a summons to Parliament Street, or, at least, to the governor's quarters across the yard; and such might have been my own fate; had not one of the women in passing twitched me lightly by the shawl, and brought me back to consciousness as the principal entered the airing-yard.

It was a thoughtful action, and as it demonstrates the good feeling that often is experienced by a prisoner for the matron in attendance, I have given it a place here.

After the hour's airing—that is, if the airing has not been already taken in the morning — the women return to their cells, and work again till half-past five, when the gruel is served into the "pints" of the prisoners. When the matron's tea is over in the mess-room, a few prayers are read by a matron standing in the centre of each ward, so that her voice can be heard by the prisoners standing at their doors of open iron-work. After prayers each woman answers to a name from the list called out, and then work recommences— coir-

picking, shirt and bag-making—till a quarter to eight, when the scissors are collected; reading, &c., is then allowed till about half-past eight, when the prisoners proceed to make their beds. At a quarter to nine o'clock the gas is turned out in the cells by the matron from without, and it is supposed that the matron's duty is over for the day, and that the prisoners are in their beds.

There are a few deviations from this routine in Brixton Prison, but it is scarcely worth while in a book of this description to trouble the reader with them—especially as the difference is not great. The hours are the same to prisoners and prison matrons at Brixton as at Millbank.

At nine o'clock in the evening the matron on night duty makes her appearance, and begins her slow rounds of the prison, passing once an hour each cell, and ready at any instant to report sickness or breach of discipline.

Slow weary hours of prison-service are these hours on night duty; pacing the dimly-lighted wards, and listening for a breath or murmur that

may be significant of one ill at ease within the cells; checking at times artful signals on the wall between one prisoner and another, or pausing, perhaps for company's sake, to whisper a "good night" to some one as sleepless as herself; passing in due course to the "dark cells" away from the general prison, and looking in to make sure the woman who has been carried there for breaking her windows, or tearing her blankets, or assaulting her officer, is quite safe; listening, perhaps, to the wild snatches of song that well thence, and may personify the screeching of some demon, vindictive and defiant, and with no claim upon humanity — striving, perhaps, to reason with her, and being sworn at for her pains, or possibly, just possibly if she be a favourite of the woman's, persuading her to be silent and to try to sleep.

And so, from night till morning, to and fro, to and fro, like a restless spirit, or a spirit rendered restless by the shadows of crime that may haunt such places at such hours, wanders the matron, till the daylight filters through the windows, and struggles with the flickering jets of gas; still the bell

clangs in the outer yard, and the matrons, and sub-matrons, and principals wake to the business of another day.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL.

In my first chapter I spoke of one appeal that I had to make on behalf of that hard-worked class to which I for many years belonged. Before passing to those prison incidents, interesting to all students of human nature, I think it will be necessary to allude to that class in general; to afford some little insight into the duties, trials, and responsibilities of prison matrons, and to get the somewhat unpleasant task of appeal or protest over as speedily as possible.

Millbank Prison now contains forty-two matrons —Brixton Prison about thirty-six. The daily average number of women at Millbank is now about 472, and that at Brixton about 620.* Therefore the proportion of officers to prisoners at Millbank is as one to thirteen and one-tenth, and at Brixton one to seventeen. It must not be understood from this that to every seventeen women there is one custodian at Brixton; amongst the thirty-six female officers, mentioned above, at Brixton, there are four principal matrons, and one chief matron, whose supervision is less confined to the prisoners than to their subordinate officers; and there are also to be deducted supernumeraries who are engaged on "flying missions" about the prison, and to whom is not entrusted the charge of a ward. It is the ward officers who are answerable for the majority of prisoners, and the proportion invariably stands as one to forty-five or fifty at Brixton, and one to thirty at Millbank. In case of an outbreak, the Brixton matrons do not stand so good a chance of immediate assistance as the female offi-

* On December 31st, 1860, there were 486 female convicts in Millbank Prison; 625 in that of Brixton Prison.

cers of Millbank, who have the warders of the men's prison within call; Brixton is exclusively a female prison, and, save one gate-keeper, a steward's porter, a cook, an engineer, and two or three workmen, there is no assistance to be procured nearer than that of Brixton station-house, a mile, or three quarters of a mile, lower down the hill.* That, as a matter of common precaution, the staff of matrons should be increased, I think is evident enough; that, as a matter of common humanity, it should be at least doubled, I hope to prove as clearly ere the chapter ends. Were the female prisoners as capable—which they fortunately are not—of organizing plans for mutiny and revolt as are the male convicts of our government establishments, there would be little chance for the matrons unfortunate enough to be on duty at the time. That there are opportunities to master the whole prison at times and seasons which would be inexpedient to mention here, I have no hesitation in asserting.

* The surgeon, steward, and chaplain, even if their services could be obtained, live out of Brixton Prison; and there are three stewards' clerks and one superintendent's clerk at work just without the prison, from nine till four.

Altogether, therefore, in Brixton and Millbank prisons there are generally some seventy-eight matrons, inclusive of principal matrons, and in these young ladies I am anxious to awaken the reader's interest and sympathy.

The prison matrons are supposed to have in each case attained the age of five or six-and-twenty years before entering the service, although this rule is not rigidly enforced, and occasionally young fair faces that have not seen one-and-twenty summers appear in the ranks, to grow aged and careworn before their natural period. The prisons are no place for such innocent and inexperienced youth, and within the last year I believe the directors have very wisely resolved to enforce more strictly the rule alluded to.

The matrons, as a body, are intelligent, well-educated, earnest young women, chiefly from that large class which has seen better days and known happier times; most of them in my experience had some sad story to tell of early orphanage, of improvident speculations that brought a family from affluence to beggary—of widowed mothers or sick sisters to support—a few of hus-

bands who died early and left them in the world with little children to work for in some way or other. Now and then a lady's-maid, recommended by a mistress who has a friend on the direction, or in the lady superintendent, passes muster, becomes one of the staff, and is often as well educated, and makes as good a Government servant, as the rest; and even by some means which are unaccountable, an illiterate being will occasionally work her way in, and confuse matters a little with ill-worded and ill-spelt reports. But the last is a rare exception now, and the majority are as heretofore described.

The advantages of a service of this kind to respectable young women are not to be lightly disregarded, notwithstanding that the duties are arduous, and the prisoners not the most cheerful or refined society. An assistant matron enters the service at a salary of thirty-five pounds per annum —from which salary is deducted three-and-fourpence a month for the uniform dress—and rises one pound a year. In case of promotion to matron, an event likely to occur in the course of three or four years' service, the salary is forty pounds per

annum, with an increase of twenty-five shillings each year; and in the event of rising to the post of principal matron—far from an impossibility before ten years' service is concluded—the salary is fifty pounds per annum, with a yearly increase of one pound ten shillings. Encouragement to persevere in their duties is freely offered to these Government servants, and a life pension awaits them at the end of ten years' service.

All this is indisputably kind and considerate, and stirs up a fair amount of emulation and perseverance amongst the female officers; promotions are not few and far between, and by the directors in particular much kindness, and even gentlemanly courtesy, are exhibited. This is the *obverse* of the medal; it is only by a little miscalculation and shortsightedness that the *reverse*—to be presently alluded to—tends to mar so much of what is really well-meant. A clever officer rises more rapidly than her contemporaries, promotion going by merit in many cases, in lieu of seniority of service; and there is an instance on record of one assistant matron rising from the lowest stage to that of deputy-superintendent. And it is but fair to state

here that never were honours more justly awarded, or borne with more humility, than in the case of Miss Annie Cook Dyer, late deputy-superintendent of Millbank Penitentiary. As a deputy-superintendent, she was a favourite with prisoners and officers; she made few enemies and many friends. Her ideas of discipline, and her methods of carrying them out, were those of a woman of genius—the right woman in the right place. That she is ignorant—and will ever remain ignorant—of the writer of this work, leads me to speak more warmly of one to whom the comfort of the prisoners, and the friendship and respect of the prison matrons, were the first considerations. Still Miss Dyer forms the one exception to the rule which stops promotion at the new post of chief matron—lately instituted at Millbank—and leaves the posts of deputy-superintendent and lady-superintendent to be filled from without by lady friends of the direction.*

Why these posts should be filled from without, when there are in the ranks of prison matrons

* Miss Dyer was really superintendent of Millbank, there being in her time no higher female officer.

many peculiarly qualified by experience and long service for the higher positions, I am at a loss to say. The experiment was tried, and was *not* a failure; and though each deputy and lady-superintendent now in office has been wisely chosen, and has shown no small aptitude for the onerous post, yet it is scarcely fair to those who have struggled step by step for some ten or twelve years, to be told that Government has no further honours to award, and that strangers must take the place to which experienced officers have, in my opinion, a more legal claim. Still this is not my grievance—I never expected to grasp the golden apples hanging so high up in the tree, and I suppose it is not in the nature of a Board of Direction to turn a stern countenance to all friendly applicants for the high places in its gift.

The matron's duties—and to be general, I shall speak of assistant-matrons and matrons under that collective title—may be easily imagined by aid of my attempt to sketch a day of prison routine in the preceding chapter. Their extra duties I will take another opportunity of alluding to. Their hours are from six in the morning till nine in the evening, and very often till ten, three times in the week;

on alternate days from six A.M. to six P.M.; the interim between six P.M. and ten being left to their own disposal, in or out of prison. There is a "Sunday out" occasionally, and during the year there are fourteen days holidays, from which are deducted those days of sick leave, which are unfortunately not few and far between --the hours being long, and the service arduous. Against these long hours I have my protest to make, and I earnestly and humbly appeal to those who have the power to alter them—for the better management of the prison, and the sure working of its complex machinery—to do that justice to a class striving honestly and energetically in the service of the State.

It is not a great while since a novelist directed attention to our daily work in the pages of a weekly periodical; the first effort of a stranger to ameliorate the condition of female servants in Government employ. The effort was marred by his statement that prison matrons worked sixteen hours a-day, when in reality there was a difference of half an hour between his statement and the truth. This, of course, applied to common days, when there

is nothing to excite the prison, or demand extra attention on the part of its officials. The hours on duty are from six A.M. to nine P.M., as already mentioned; in addition there is a quarter of an hour for dressing in the morning, also a quarter of an hour after duty for arranging any little matters connected with the business of the ensuing day. Reckoning fifteen and a half hours' duty three days in the week, and twelve and a half on alternate days, an average of fourteen hours a-day is obtained; too much labour—and such labour!—for any woman not blessed with an undue amount of robustness and muscular power.

A few more matrons on the staff at Millbank and Brixton Prisons would obviate this unnecessary slavery, and not add a costly item to the balance-sheet of prison government. I am assured it would be a saving in the end, for some of the best officers in the prison fall ill after four or five years' service; some break up and die, and their places being hard to fill, time is lost in teaching the new assistants who arrive and are put upon probation. Fourteen hours a-day for seven days in the week—for Sunday is not a day of rest to prison

matrons, save when it is a Sunday's leave of absence*—fourteen hours a-day, Christian ladies and gentlemen, of unceasing vigilance, with a mind ever strung to its highest degree of tension, and a body that is expected to be ubiquitous. Of the extra duty of removing a prisoner to a refractory cell—of the extra attention likely to be bestowed upon a matron by a vindictive prisoner, in the shape of a pewter pint on the back of the head—of the nights when the past day's excitement, like the Thane of Cawdor, "murders sleep"—of the sudden rousings by the night officer, to see to a woman in some particular ward to which the matron belongs, I say nothing; events foreign to a day's routine happen almost every day, and they add to the fatigue and anxiety of these constant workers. Say, however, that only fourteen hours a-day are expected of a prison matron—and that an increase thereto is a glaring exception to the rule—is the rule just, humane, or politic?

I have seen women off duty on the *twelve hour* nights fling themselves exhausted on their beds,

* Matrons are on duty on Sundays from seven A.M. till nine P.M.

too tired to take advantage of the fresh air outside which they are at liberty to seek; I have known young women enter full of health and strength, and depart from the service in a few years, aged and anxious-looking, with no strength left for any new employment; I have known others die. It is a service that makes its officers old before their time, and undermines their constitution; it calls for reformation; it must obtain it in good time, if those who have suffered will only honestly speak out. It is like no other service under heaven; and a little thought amongst the Directors—thoughtful and kind-hearted men too!—one little dash of the pen from the Secretary of State, and the Exchequer would be but a few hundred pounds poorer in the year, these Government *employées* spared much ill-health, and the Government itself benefited by their longer service and their greater energy.

It is the worst of principles—it is the most cruel as well as the most mistaken policy—to overwork a faithful servant; and particularly when these servants are women who for divers reasons have chosen an ungrateful profession, are interested in it, and

anxious—too anxious—to do their very best. If Prison Directors, or Government, or the High Court of Parliament, would but do the very best towards them also!

Lying before me at the present time is a pile of reports of prison authorities, governors, physicians, surgeons, chaplains, &c., of Brixton and Millbank, to the Secretary of State; reports ranging from 1855 to 1860.

Throughout all these reports is evident a timidity to enter upon any topic that suggests extra expense. There are compliments for those who conduct the prison with economy, and a careful governor stands an excellent chance of becoming a director. There is only one suggestion to increase the staff of prison matrons throughout all these dry volumes of facts and figures,—skeletons of prison life, with no flesh and blood to make them living, breathing truths; and that suggestion, to his credit be it recorded, comes from the Rev. J. H. Moran, Chaplain of Brixton Prison, in his report for 1859. Governors, superintendents, even physicians and surgeons, are all silent on this subject, and, as a natural result, Government is apathetic.

"I think the staff of officers is small," the chaplain writes; "and I venture to observe that if the number could be increased it would be a great advantage." This is followed by a half apology for mentioning the matter to the Directors in Parliament Street.

No notice has been taken of this suggestion, and prison matrons still come and go with great rapidity. There is some little awkward attempt to account for these secessions; of course there are other causes besides illness, distaste for the arduous service, &c., that thin the ranks of prison matrons—some have been on probation, it must be understood—but the chief reason is always wanting. In one report it is alleged that the resignation of so great a number as twelve matrons in one year was "for reasons affecting their particular convenience, unconnected with the exigencies of the public service!"—a strange excuse for so wholesale a resignation.

The matrons of prisons are not of the grumbling order, however. There is not one of my old companions, or of the new staff which has followed the old one, that is aware of my intention to speak here in their defence. The hours are known before they

enter the service; and woman is sanguine and impulsive, and will not shrink at any task before her. A situation is wanted—a situation that has many advantages is offered—and if it required twenty-four hours' service, instead of fourteen, there would be the same rush of eager applicants.

And in the midst of it all, despite their arduous labours—sometimes their failing health—it is pleasant to see the good feeling existing amongst the female officers; to witness the lasting friendships that are formed between them, and the *entente cordiale* that almost universally prevails. There are little "tiffs" at times; a question of supremacy now and then, some officer asserting her superior dignity with a burlesque majesty that has even its good-tempered side; but there is, on the whole, much love amongst them, as is natural with young women born with loving hearts. I could tell many a story illustrative of their warm affections—of their tenderness, love, and care in sickness and in health—that would interest the reader, but it is not the task I have set myself, and prison matrons as a rule will flit but lightly through these pages; women made of sterner stuff have to play their

troubled parts in the foreground of this shadowy prison life.

Still it is as well that the world should know that these useful, humble servants are doing its hardest and most unthankful work; rewarded for their care of, and often their intense interest in, the prisoners, by an ingratitude that from such women it is but natural to expect. The matrons are cheerful over their tasks; the meetings at the mess-room table are friendly *réunions* that contrast vividly with the darker side of their official position—and bright faces, new to prison life, take the place of the old servants, who have left from choice, or from illness, or to get married.

They are willing servants—faithful, energetic, and thoughtful. Should they be worked too hard, or taken too much advantage of?

CHAPTER V.

PRISONERS IN GENERAL.

I SHOULD be sorry to cast any undue romantic interest over the characters of female prisoners, although it will be presently my duty to direct a little attention to certain of these women whose lives have had as much romance in them as most people's. And indeed that is not to be wondered at, when it is considered what a tempest-tossed life a woman's must have been, to have brought her to this dark estate.

But they are not all heroines mourning over the error of their ways, and the faltering, down-

ward steps that led them to an abyss of crime, and left them there—albeit they may all be women we can pity.

Charles Dickens, in one of his Christmas works, asserts eloquently that, however low they may have fallen, they grasp still in their hands some tufts and shreds of that unfenced precipice from which they fell in their decline from virtue, and that not to pity them is to do them wrong in time and in eternity. And it is even possible—however deceptive outward appearances may be—that they all retain in their memory some fragmentary yearnings for the better past, the brighter days of their innocence and youth. But to see some of these women hour by hour, and listen to them in their mad defiance, rage, and blasphemy, almost constrains one to believe that they are creatures of another mould and race, born with no idea of God's truth, and destined to die in their own benighted ignorance.

As a class, they are desperately wicked—deceitful, crafty, malicious, lewd, and void of common feeling. With their various temperaments there are various ways of humouring them into

obedience, and sometimes a chance of inducing them to act and think judiciously; but it can be readily imagined that all the vices under the sun are exemplified in these hundreds of women, with but a sparse sprinkling of those virtues which should naturally adorn and dignify womanhood.

> "For men at most differ as Heaven and earth,
> But women, worst and best, as Heaven and hell,"

asserts our greatest living poet; and no two lines, I fear, are more true to human nature.

In the penal classes of the male prisons there is not one man to match the worst inmates of our female prisons. There are some women so wholly and entirely bad, that chaplains give them up in despair, prison rules prove failures, and punishment has no effect, save to bring the prisoners to "death's door," on the threshold of which their guilty tongues still curse and revile, and one must let them have their way, or see them die. Some women are less easy to tame than the creatures of the jungle, and one is almost sceptical of believing that they had ever known an innocent childhood or

a better life. And yet, strange as it may appear, these women are not always in for the worst crimes; there are few, if any, murderesses amongst them; they have been chiefly convicted of theft after theft, accompanied by violence, and they are satanically proud of the offences that have brought them within the jurisdiction of the law.

In the prison the teaching that should have begun with the women in their girlhood is commenced, and exercises in a few instances a salutary influence; but ignorance, deep, besotting ignorance, is the characteristic of almost every fresh woman on whom the key turns in her cell. It keeps our prisons full, our judges always busy. Three-fourths of our prisoners before their conviction were unable to read a word, had no knowledge of the Bible or what was in it, had never heard of a Saviour, and only remembered God's name as coupled with a curse. Some women have been trained up to be thieves, and worse than thieves, by their mothers—taking their lessons in crime with a regularity and a persistence that, turned to better things, would have made them loved and honoured all their lives. They

have been taught all that was evil, and the evil tree has flourished and borne fruit; it is the hardest task to train so warped and distorted a creation the right and fitting way. Praise be to those hard-working, unflinching prison chaplains who strive their utmost, and are not always unsuccessful; who have occasionally the avowed repentance of one sinner to counterbalance the ninety and nine who scoff at all contrition, and do not, will not, understand, to use their own terms, "what the parson's driving at."

One of the most embarrassing positions for a well-educated prisoner—a lady-thief or swindler—is to mix with these kinds of women. It is an additional torture to her punishment, for which she is wholly unprepared. They do not understand her or her ways; at Brixton Prison, where there is association, they will sometimes shun her. There are times even when, singularly enough, they taunt her with her education. "You was larnt better than us, and shouldn't ha' come here," I heard a woman say once. Cleaning their cells and scrubbing the stones appear the hardest trials. "Oh! dear," a lady prisoner said once over this kind of labour,

"will this do, miss—or shall I try to scrub a little harder? I think I can!"

To hear some of the prisoners' excuses for their appearance in prison, would almost induce one to believe in that disease of kleptomania which has been lately talked about—or in some familiar demon or tempter, as in the old books of James's time, constantly at these poor creatures' elbows, to suggest the profitable nature of sin, and the vanity of all that is upright and honourable. A returned woman—that is, a woman who has been let out on her ticket of leave, and has forfeited it by her misconduct—or who has been reconvicted, perhaps under a false name—always asserts that it wasn't to be avoided, *something* made her seek out her old pals, or steal her neighbour's goods again.

"I did try very hard, miss," she will sometimes say to the matron who may be interested in her; and if she believes in that interest the matron has more power over her and more influence with her than the chaplain. "I did try very hard, but it wasn't to be. I was obliged to steal, or to watch some one there was a chance of stealing from. I did try my best, but it couldn't be helped, and here

I am. It wasn't my fault exactly, because I *did* try, you see, miss!"

There are other prisoners not so frank—and these prisoners form the majority—who stoutly maintain, to the last, their innocence of the crime for which they are incarcerated. However indisputable may have been the proofs alleged against them, they are always ill-used unfortunates, who have been made the victims of a foul conspiracy to place them "in durance vile." They will assert these fabrications to chaplain, superintendent, matrons, and to each other, with a cool effrontery that no facts can diminish, and will quarrel upon the point amongst themselves occasionally. And though each is firm to her own story, she believes not a word of anybody else's—"That Ball—or that Matthews—was always such a liar!"

Of the vanity and the mischievous tricks of prison life, I will not speak in this chapter; they exemplify so many singular traits of character, that they deserve to be treated at greater length than this discursive summary can possibly allow. It is sufficient to say here that

the majority of women are inordinately vain and incorrigibly mischievous.

The most trying ordeal for all prisoners is that of probation at Millbank—the silent system, as it may almost be termed. That it is simply impossible to make the female prisoners conform to strictly silent rules, or to any rules, for a length of time, all officers of female prisons will bear me out in; there is a restlessness and excitability in the character of these women, that makes the charge of them infinitely more of a labour and a study than the management of treble the number of men.

The male prisoners are influenced by some amount of reason and forethought, but the female prisoner flies in the very face of prudence, and acts more often like a mad woman than a rational, reflecting human being. Those who are cunning enough to carry on, by signs, and looks, and tappings on the wall, a correspondence with their neighbours, are less refractory than those of less experience in evading prison rules. I have known many women, in defiance of a day or two's bread and water, suddenly shout across

the airing yard, or from one cell to another, with a noise all the more vehement for the long restraint to which they had been subjected; and such a proceeding, if remonstrated with, is generally followed by a smashing of windows, and a tearing up of sheets and blankets, that will often affect half a ward with a similar mania, if the delinquent is not speedily carried off to refractory quarters.

It has been long observed that the force of example, in the matter of "breakings out," is sure to be strikingly exemplified; that for the sake of change even, and for that excitement which appears to be part of their being, without which they must go melancholy mad, two or three women will, in a quiet, aggravating manner, arrange for a systematic smashing of windows and tearing of sheets and blankets.

I have even known women address their matrons in a style similar to the following:

"Miss G., I'm going to break out to-night."

"Oh! nonsense!—you won't think of any such folly, I'm sure."

Persuasion is generally attempted first, as a

"breaking out" disturbs a whole prison for a day or two.

"I'm sure I shall, then."

"What for?"

"Well, I've made up my mind, that's what for. I shall break out to-night—see if I don't!"

"Has any one offended you, or said anything?"

"N—no. But I *must* break out. It's so dull here. I'm sure to break out."

"And then you'll go to the 'dark.'"

"I want to go to the 'dark,'" is the answer.*

And the breaking out often occurs as promised; the glass shatters out of the window frames, strips of sheets and blankets are passed through, or left in a heap in the cell, the guards are sent for, and there is a scuffling, and fighting, and scratching, and screaming that Pandemonium might equal, nothing else.

These "breaking-out women" are naturally the most difficult class to deal with—as already observed, severe measures effect but little good,

* If the matron really believes the woman's determination to break out, the prisoner is taken to the "dark" at once.

and any humouring, or sign of fear, gives the woman the mastery at once. It is here the superintendent's judicious care is required, and the gentle but firm remonstrance of an educated woman often produces a good impression upon the listener. It has been observed by Sir Joshua Jebb, in his report for 1859, that "the most refractory prisoner is not of necessity the worst woman," a remark which is erroneously attributed to Mrs. Gibson by a writer in the *Cornhill Magazine*, who asserts that it is the exact converse of what he has heard from sagacious men in all prisons, and from Mr. Partridge, Secretary of the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society.*

Still, though it does not follow that the most refractory woman is the worst character of the penal class, yet there are some of the worst women amongst that number. According to my own idea there are two classes of refractory women —if not more. There is the sullen, dogged, vindictive prisoner, who nurses her fancied wrongs and breaks out on principle, and from whose

* *Cornhill Magazine* for June, 1861. Article—"English Convict System," page 726.

resolution no prayers or protestations will distract her; and there is the fiery-tempered "refractory," who, taking offence at a sharp word, or when smarting under a sudden sense of injury or jealousy, goes madly to work at everything breakable and tearable within range at the moment. The latter nature, which is quick to resent offence, is often as quickly sensible to kindness, and, therefore, a kind and judicious treatment will frequently exercise a vast amount of good. Still such treatment must be of the most delicate kind, and, above all, favouritism must be avoided, for, in studying her too much, fifty others will fall away, or seek to render themselves bad imitations of her. Also, they are keen observers and great mimics, these prisoners, and are not slow to profit by any *ruse* that will promote their interests—advance them nearer to the second and first class, take them to Brixton, make them "badge-women" and "kitchen-women," or add a little more to the "gratuities" which are waiting for them when their term of service has expired. The breakings out are not always instances of "violent ebullitions of temper," but are actuated by a

craving for change—if that change be even to the dark cells—or for anything that will tend to relieve the monotony of existence. Occasionally at Millbank, in troublous times, when the dark cells are known to be already occupied, women will break their windows, and strike, or attempt to strike, their officers, for company's sake, knowing that they must have a companion for a day or two; and a companion, even with bread and water by way of diet, is better than silent existence under separate confinement.

The dark cells have been long secretly acknowledged failures, and a fitting and proper punishment for these troubled spirits might be thought of with advantage. Confinement in these cells is an objectionable punishment; it affects the prisoner's health; it has never worked any good, and it has done much moral, physical, and even mental injury. It has always appeared, in my eyes, a relic of the old barbarous times, the little-minded style of punishment, as childish in one sense as it is cruel in another.

There are women more difficult to manage than these refractory prisoners; cunning and treacherous women, ever on the alert to take a

matron off her guard, or lead another prisoner into trouble. These are the sly, crafty natures, that have no good feelings to be worked upon—that may be observant of all prison rules for years, and then attempt the life of any one to whom they have long borne a grudge—women with murderous thoughts, who will hide scissors, or jagged pieces of stone, that very mysteriously find their way into the prison, and are surreptitiously used by the women to clean the flagstones in the wards. The prisoners are quick to take advantage of new officers, and lay traps to lead them into some minor breach of rules—involving a fine of half-a-crown or five shillings, and occasionally summary dismissal from the service; women with the cunning of him who deceived our mother Eve.

Then there are the flighty women; the half mad or the wholly mad, who require some careful observation to make sure that they are not acting, and who are at last taken away to Fisherton Asylum, and are heard of no more.

It may be remarked, as a curious fact, that the prisoners are always the most ill-behaved at Christmas time. During my stay at Brixton Prison, it

was remarkable that the dark cells were always full on Christmas-day. I have often wondered whether there were any past associations connected with that time, to render the mind restless and excitable.

As an instance of some rough sense of justice and good feeling amongst the general body of female prisoners, the following incident that occurred at Millbank Prison, some time since, may be considered interesting:—

At Millbank the rules are stringent, and, it may be frankly confessed, not always rigidly observed. Little variations on the original rules have gradually crept in, and become almost rules in themselves—now and then the variations are improvements upon the original idea, and so are tacitly allowed to stand. Each matron, it must be understood, selects a well-behaved prisoner, for a week or fortnight, to attend to her own private room in the ward; and this woman is changed for a second, third, or fourth, according to the turn. Much trust is placed in the prisoner, and very often there is much good faith between her and the matron. It has often happened that a careless officer has left her drawers unlocked, a little trinket, ring, brooch, or

ear-ring on her toilet table, and these acts of forgetfulness are more often the occasion of illustrating the prisoner's honest service than otherwise. Occasionally, of course, a brooch or ring disappears, and is heard of no more; but, as a rule, it is pleasant to add that anything readily purloinable is generally left untouched by the woman in attendance. There are some women so thoroughly honest in this respect, that they may be implicitly confided in.

Naturally, then, the matrons have their favourite women; and in the instance to which I allude a woman had been kept a longer time than usual in attendance, to the chagrin of other prisoners as anxious for a little variety to their occupation, if not as equally deserving. Strangely enough, however, it was not a prisoner who reported the matron, but a new and very inexperienced assistant-matron, anxious to demonstrate to the authorities her knowledge of the rules—possibly her sense of what was strictly just.*

* Strictly speaking, the assistant-matron did not report this breach of the rules, but the discussion which arose therefrom between her and her superior officer. Thus the facts of the case as stated came to light.

The matron was summoned before the governor of the prison, and suspended from office for a certain period—a sentence that, appearing to the fair delinquent extremely harsh and oppressive, considering her offence but the infraction of a rule that had long been "more honoured in the breach than the observance," led to her impetuous resignation of an appointment which she had filled for some years with tact and judgment. The resignation was accepted, the matron quitted the prison, and the story circulated amongst the prisoners with that celerity which has often perplexed the authorities as to their means of information. The matron who had departed was a favourite among the prisoners, and the assistant-matron's sense of justice was set down by these rapidly calculating minds to a very different feeling. From the day the news circulated through the prison that the matron had resigned, that assistant-matron was a mark of scorn and derision to every woman in the wards over which the favourite officer had exercised control. Her orders were disobeyed, in defiance of all authority—women rushed at her to strike her

—her chance appearance in the airing-yard, on which the windows of the cells looked, was the signal one day for the general appearance of the women at their windows, hissing, yelling, and reviling with a vehemence that alarmed the whole prison, and necessitated the withdrawal of the assistant for a few days from active duty. But prisoners have tenacious memories. On the assistant's reappearance, the same supreme contempt for her was exhibited; and one morning, when the women had been marshalled into chapel, and were awaiting the chaplain's arrival, a sudden rush of the prisoners was made upon the unfortunate object of their anger, and it was only timely assistance that prevented serious injuries befalling her. So persistent, indeed, were the prisoners to take up the cudgels in defence of their matron, and the presence of that particular assistant-matron tended so much to the subversion of all discipline, that it became necessary to remove her from government service.

Women really diligent, anxious to conform to prison rules, and having some sense of shame at the ignominy of their position—there are some

of these characters to leaven a mass of unpliable material—have many little chances of getting on in the present, and doing well in the future. There are breaks in the monotony of their existence; letter-writing days, if they are able to write, and, if not able, they are at liberty to dictate to a woman who can*—days of schooling—days of extra duties out of their cell, in attendance on a matron—days of association, or "palling in," as they term it at Brixton Prison—days of seeing directors, to make remonstrances or solicit extra favours—days of seeing the surgeon about their little ailments. Some of these advantages are of course open to the ill-behaved as well as the well-disciplined—and however frivolous the plea, any woman can demand to see the doctor or the directors. It is a right and privilege, and there are many who, taking undue advantage of it, become no small nuisance to the authorities. Further allu-

* No dictation, save to the schoolmistress, is allowed at Millbank, however. All letters at both prisons are seen by the chaplain's clerk, or some other officer, before leaving the prison; and all letters received for prisoners are opened and read by the superintendent's clerk.

sion to these days, and the sad and humorous incidents connected with them, will be made at a later stage of my reminiscences.

Of the days most trying to all prisoners, either at Brixton or Millbank, are those approaching the time when the locks shall be unfastened, the doors swung wide, and the world once again shall lie before them, where to choose. Days verging on the glorious freedom for which they have pined, and fretted, and prayed for years, and yet which they will grow so awfully indifferent to, as to give them up for a new sentence and the old miserable life, before their liberty perhaps is three months old.

Excitable, dream-like days these are to the prisoners; days of a confused sense of the real and the unreal, under which some thoughtful prisoner, with her heart full of going home, will make strange blunders. Days so excitable that some prisoners will go mad over them, and smash their windows, tear up their needle-work after the old frenzied manner, and go back to the "dark" for the last time—nay, have been, in my knowledge liberated from the "dark," and passed thence to

the free air and sunshine, possibly all the more enjoyable for the vivid contrast presented by their late position. But these are exceptional cases; as a rule, the woman are well-behaved in the latter days—nervous and confused, proud of the envy with which their companions regard them, but respectful and obedient to all the prison officers. They are most of them going to reform, to lead such lives in the future, to give up all the past associates whose company and vile example led them astray when they were younger and had less experience of life, and less knowledge of the difference between right and wrong! Some of them are really imbued with the best intentions, and proceed from prison to the Prisoners' Aid Society —a society that deserves to be more extensively patronized, but whose management of the female department is open to improvement—but others, it is sad to say, have already sketched out a plan of the old life, "with the difference" that they are to escape the clutch of a police-officer. Some women whose expiration of sentence occurs at, or nearly at, the same period of time, arrange a place of meeting and a plan of living by theft, or

on those cruel streets wherein, we are told, wander after nightfall, in one city alone, at least forty thousand erring women.

On the day of liberty, women who live in the country are conducted to the railway station, seen into the railway carriage by a prison matron, and their fare paid by Government to the station nearest home; if they are residents in London, a matron accompanies them home, and with a few parting words leaves them with their friends (?). All this is wise, generous, and merciful, and reflects the highest credit on those who framed this portion of our prison rules. While there is amidst these rules a little to complain of, there is also much to applaud—much evidence of a consideration for the future welfare of society's "offscourings." The satirist has a sneer upon his lip when he terms ours "a paternal government," but it *has* a fatherly interest in its misguided children—and the satirist is not always in the right.

The women, however bad, or however different their ultimate intentions, conform to this rule of the authorities. I can remember but one instance where a woman refused to be given over

to her friends in London, and was left at the prison gates to proceed her own way. As an instance of good feeling, I may add that one woman, whose gratuity, after long service, only amounted to a pound—the damage done by prisoners in "breaking out" being deducted from the money they earn—sent fifteen shillings' worth of boots, etc., back to the prison, as a present for one with whom she had "palled in," to be given her on the day of her discharge. "From her loving sister," the packet was labelled, to avoid the rule which allows no presents from a discharged prisoner to another in captivity; and the boots, etc., were delivered in due course. The heroine of this little anecdote "turned up" again within a month of her release, and told the story for herself with much complacency, and with considerable exultation at having "done" the authorities.

Some of these departures are a little trying to the matrons and other officers; a stoical firmness is hard to assume when a woman has really resolved on a new mode of life, and is departing, sanguine as to her success in the future. The

day before her departure she has an interview with the lady-superintendent, who is generally the first to apprise her that her time is up—the prisoner is aware of it herself, to the hour and minute—and that the warrant for her release has been received from the office of the Secretary of State. This interview over, the woman returns to her cell, to whisper to her old companions all that the superintendent has told her, and of the good wishes and the warnings she has given her. The next day the chaplain sees her, to make his last effort for her soul's sake; to speak of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and of Him who died for all sinners, and will not forget her in her time of need, if she will struggle on against the wrong, and pray to Him. There is the friendly good-bye,—the present of Bible, hymn-book, and prayer-book; then follow the last look round the old cell, the more wistful glance at the matron who has been kind to her; the impulsive or the shy, hesitative stretching forth of the hand towards that officer—it may be against the rules, no matter—the last wishes of the matron, and then, with many to bid her God-speed, she passes,

from the prison into that air and sunshine God destined for all His creatures—a free woman!

CHAPTER VI.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—THE GARNETTS.

THE reader will understand that, where I do not intimate that I have adopted the anonymous in these outlines of prison character, the real name of the prisoner is invariably given. In the present instance I have changed the name. The Garnetts were two industrious, hard-working women in my time—they have now gone back to their old homes and their past occupations; and though in their desolate country life it would be a

strange marvel for them to come across these records, yet it would not be fair to raise mercilessly the veil.

The Garnetts were mother and daughter—tried at the same time, and for the same crime. They received the same sentence, and were forwarded to the same prison at Millbank. They were tall, thin, angular women, taciturn and grave, who came to serve their sentence out for manslaughter, and who narrowly escaped the charge of murder.

Their crime was the starvation of the younger daughter of the elder prisoner; and the case aroused much public indignation at the time, the evidence of cruelty and privation of food being conclusive, despite the denial of the prisoners. The husband of Susannah Garnett, a shepherd, was also tried for the same offence, but his constant absence from home was looked upon as an extenuating circumstance, and he received but one year's imprisonment. Great stress at the time was laid upon the condition of the other daughters, one of whom—a girl of sixteen—weighed but forty-six and a half pounds a week or two before the trial.

The deceased daughter, it was deposed, had been kept without nourishment for two nights, being unable through illness to do her pillow lace, and food being sternly refused her in consequence by her penurious taskmistresses. Such was the evidence at least of two daughters at the trial, which evidence consigned the mother and elder daughter to prison. "Oh! Lord Jesus, help me to do my work next week!" were the dying words of the victim, it was alleged. There was a counter statement, to the effect that the daughters were actuated by malice, and had sworn falsely; but it was not believed, and mother and daughter were found guilty of manslaughter, and sentenced to four years' penal servitude.

(It may not be amiss to call attention here to a mistake in the Annual Register for 1856, where the sentence is recorded as two years' penal servitude.)

They arrived, two pitiable, emaciated creatures, in whom life seemed struggling hard, and whose chance of working out their sentence was doubtful in the extreme. They passed each to a separate cell in a different ward, and

parted in a cool phlegmatic manner, making no parade of feeling.

From the first day of their arrival to the last day of their sentence, they were cool and undemonstrative, objecting to any conversation with the other prisoners, expressing more by a vague stare than by words their surprise at prison ways and rules, to all of which they were anxious to conform to the best of their ability. They were civil to their matrons, grateful in their quiet way for a kind word, but shy of speaking, and of eccentric habits.

On prison diet, which was a higher state of living than they had been accustomed to for many years, they began slowly to gather strength, and eventually became more fitted for the work required by the establishment.

In contradistinction to the slowness, almost torpidity, of her earlier days, the younger Garnett began to exhibit a briskness over her work, and an interest in it, significant of contentment with her position. The famine-haunted look about her keen grey eyes had by this time wholly disappeared. The mother,

too, made rapid progress to some semblance of healthy womanhood, and both worked diligently on towards a better position.

Naturally of phlegmatic dispositions, they evinced no concern at their first separation, and made no inquiries concerning each other. Each sat in her cell striving to work her best, and arranging everything around her in that extra methodical manner common to country folk in general.

"Don't you wish to know how your daughter is getting on?" was asked of the elder Garnett one day.

"She's getting on very well," answered the mother; "she be a quiet girl, and no trouble to you, I'm sure, lady."

"Not much trouble, certainly."

On the same question being put to the daughter, respecting the mother, she looked up quietly from her coir-picking, and hoped mother hadn't been a-fidgeting! There did not appear any evidence of love between these two strange characters—neither cared to talk of the other—if there was any balance of affection to be

struck between them, it was in favour of the mother.

But they were both simple—almost half-witted—country women, in whom all the love, interest, and sympathy that should have naturally existed between such dear relations, appeared to have been frozen years ago. Their years had been spent in struggling so hard for a living,—or to save money, denying themselves even the common necessaries of life,—that they had had no thought for home ties and home affections, and had grown too old and stony, both of them, for such flowers to flourish in their prison home.

The matrons, who had been brought up after a different fashion,—many of whom had mothers living, whom they went to see on off nights or on the Sundays,—could not understand this ossification of the affections, and planned in their younger, warmer hearts an apparently chance meeting between the two country women.

Certain prisoners are selected from different wards to serve dinners, etc., in charge of the ward matron; and the two prisoners, mother

and daughter, met, for the first time after their incarceration, in the kitchen at Millbank.

It was not intended that any conversation should ensue between them; but it was thought that there would be a pleasant satisfaction to both in their silent meeting, the remembrance of which would help to lighten their solitary labours. The result was a failure.

The coldest and the most unconcerned of glances passed between mother and daughter, one slight stare, then continued application to their duties, and no second look from one to the other; on the contrary, the most perfect ignoring of each other's presence. They went on with their separate tasks in the old icy fashion, and showed no signs of any excitement of feeling during that day, or ever once alluded to the circumstance of their meeting.

They seemed perfectly content with their position, and looked forward with no agreeable anticipations to a change. When they thoroughly understood the prison rules, as to the three classes through which prisoners pass at Millbank before becoming eligible for Brixton—the last being

a transfer to an association ward—they evinced no satisfaction, expressed no wish to be placed together. Once only, so far as my own experience is concerned, was any reference made to the nature of the crime which had placed them in their sad position. It had suggested itself one day to one of the matrons that the elder Garnett was more abstracted, even despondent, than usual, and, with a kindness not uncharacteristic of her class, she asked if anything was troubling her, or if there was anything she wished.

"Oh! no, lady," she replied at once.

"I thought you were dull."

"I'm very comfortable, thank you."

"You are not fretting about the length of your sentence?"

"I've nothing to fret about, lady; I'm better off here than I ever was in ——shire. We were all starving there together; and my husband, who was a shepherd, was very ill, and my daughters were weak too, and we had nothing to give them—nothing at all to give them or ourselves, and so my daughter died. But, lady, it wasn't in our power to help her."

She appeared a little relieved in mind at this statement, but never again repeated it to any of the matrons under whose charge she was placed. She made no parade of her innocence; only this one simple allusion to it, that sounded to us—who are fair judges of what is real or false—very like the truth. It is almost the only instance where we have fancied there was some mistake in the conviction, and yet protestations of innocence are made to us every day.

In prison, they were ever quiet, hard-working, religious women, keeping aloof from the other prisoners, asking no favour from the authorities, seemingly content with their position.

When they had worked their way to association, they were kindly allowed to occupy one cell, instead of each being placed with a stranger. Their first meeting was after the old apathetic fashion.

"Well, Elizabeth."

"Well, mother."

They were seated opposite each other at the table, two minutes after their meeting, working silently and monotonously. There appeared to

be no subject between them on which they cared to converse; they took up their new position without any display of feeling, just as if it had been a prison rule to which they were compelled to conform, and to which they had no particular objection.

After a week's association, a matron asked the daughter whether she was not glad to have her mother as companion.

"Ye-es, lady," was the hesitating answer; "it's a kind of change, but"—with a little impulsive dash—"she do make a great mess and litter, to be sure!"

I am inclined to think that it was this strange, apathetic indifference—this unimpressionability—that was more the cause of the younger child's death than any studied intent to starve her. A natural want of sensibility was evident in both; but looking at them in their quietness and simple-mindedness, I have never for a moment thought these women murderesses.

The relation of their habits for a few days is the history of their whole imprisonment—with the same frigidity of demeanour they passed

from Millbank to Brixton, wore the special service dress at the latter prison, served out the sentence, and went back to their own old life and desolateness. A little while before departure, they expressed some short dry thanks to all who had been kind to them, and then the curtain dropped between them and their prison days, and shut them from my view.

CHAPTER VII.

SEEING THE DIRECTOR, LADY-SUPERINTENDENT, AND SURGEON.

GOVERNMENT has great consideration for its captives; no undue severity, no cruel injustice, can be perpetrated by officers on prisoners. Each woman has the privilege of speaking out, and the right of seeing the Director or the lady-superintendent on certain days of the week. Every Wednesday, at Brixton Prison, a woman with a grievance can leave her cell, accom-

panied by a principal matron, and repair to the Director's office with her catalogue of wrongs or injuries. The lady-superintendent — who, it must be premised, exercises her discretion as to putting down the names of these women— has seen the prisoners a day or two before, and made sure that their questions are not frivolous or objectionable. Some women are only anxious to see the lady-superintendent, and have a terror of facing the great authority on prison matters; others, more bold and confident, will see the Director only, and make their statement to that gentleman alone.

If a prisoner be determined to "go up," on the Director's day, with a question she is very well assured will be considered out of course, or the statement of an insult or injury which she is pretty certain will be pooh-poohed by her auditor, the woman will occasionally make a false, yet reasonable, excuse to the lady-superintendent, and pass that way, to surprise that lady during the Director's visit by a statement wholly different. Under these circumstances, the woman receives some punishment,

and is summarily dismissed from the Director's presence.

Still, punishment or not, it has been a change from the monotony of her position—an hour, or three-quarters of an hour, stolen from the wearisome round of regular duty—something to think about for a day or two hence. The women leave their cells in charge of a matron, as I have observed, and are shown on the Wednesday into the superintendent's office, where sit the Director and the lady-superintendent. They are seen one at a time—the principal matron and a male officer, or superintendent's messenger, accompanying each woman.

Let us imagine ourselves shadowy witnesses of such an interview.

"Well, Jones, what have you to say to me?" possibly inquires the Director.

"If you please, sir," dropping a curtsey, "I want to stop away from Fulham—I hear, sir, as how I'm to go on to the Refuge, and I'd rather not go, if you please, sir. Oh! I'd so much rather stop!"

"For what reason?"

"Why, sir, I've never had a report here, sir; and I likes my officer, and knows 'em all like, and am very comfor'ble. And you see, sir, I've a bit of a temper, and shall be all strange and worrited in a new place, and sure to break out, sir, and be sent to Millbank, sir, again. And if you'll only be so kind as to let me stop, sir."

The Director mentions the advantages of Fulham over Brixton; but the woman expresses her objection more firmly, and perhaps there is a little conversation between the Director and the lady-superintendent on the merits of the case.

In a matter of this description the issue is doubtful; now and then a woman receives permission to remain; at times, Brixton is full of women and Fulham the reverse, and, *nolens volens*, the prisoner must go.

When permission to stay has been refused, a woman will occasionally break her windows, and thus, by the laws of the prison, prevent her transfer to the Refuge. This act is invariably punished by the removal of the prisoner

to Millbank, to the silent system and coir-picking again.

Some women are just as eager to know from the Director why they have not been sent to Fulham, and are anxious to argue the matter with him, that they may prove how fitting they are for the removal, and how well they have behaved since their sojourn at Brixton. These women's cases are inquired into, and one is found to be too old (the maximum age is forty years), the health of another is too delicate (strong, healthy women only are received), or some other reason equally in the way of their transfer is discovered..

Occasionally a woman, bursting with her imaginary wrongs, enters into a full detail of the ill-treatment she has received from Miss R., or Miss W., or the principal—who may be standing at her side. Such a report on her conduct is unjust or exaggerated, or wholly false; she has been always set upon, whilst others just as bad—"fifty times wus, sir"—have been let off, or winked at. Then there's lot of favourites!—and because she don't care to follow suit and curry favour, she's served

so, and reported on, and trodden under foot. And all she's got to say is, that it had better be altered, that's all—she's stood enough of it!

The Director will inquire into it, the woman shall have every justice, and after the complainant's withdrawal Miss R. or Miss W. is put on her defence.* The Directors, on the whole, are very kind and considerate to the prison matrons, and invariably spare them the humiliation of an explanation before the woman who has a charge to prefer against them. It would be painful to the matron, place her in a false position, and render her more open to similar attacks from badly-disposed prisoners. The explanation, or rather the statement, is soon made; the woman, as a rule, is always in the wrong, and has invented the charge as an excuse to see the Director, or with a vague idea of annoying the officer of her division.

Still, such a charge at any time is an exception to the many pleas urged by the prisoners as a ground

* One woman who pleaded for an investigation into her report, and was refused, went back to her cell and hanged herself.

for leaving their ordinary work; and only the worst of women, the most bold or mendacious, face the Director with so extreme a grievance.

If a woman of the latter class, hopeless of favour, and reckless of any punishment, is by any means introduced into the Director's presence, she will express her mind very forcibly, if inelegantly, and in her sweeping accusations or vituperations include the gentleman into whose presence she has been shown. This will be an anecdote to relate with much bravado to her "co-mates" and *sisters* in exile, after her punishment for the offence is over, and by those as bad as herself many compliments will be bestowed for her "pluck" or "game" in what is termed "cheeking the Director."

I may say that nearly two-thirds of the women making application for an interview with the Director have but one question, and only one, to ask—the very natural, anxious question as to the time when their confinement will terminate. They are in for six, eight, or ten years—when will they be at liberty?—on what day and at what hour *exactly?* They are perfectly aware of the day

and even the hour, but still, in their particular cases, will not an exception be made to the general rule? One has never had a report; why should she not go out at an earlier period than another who has been always "smashing," and always going to Millbank? Another has rendered some little service, hindered a breaking out, or perhaps prevented an attack upon a particular matron—won't there be something taken off for *that?*

There are times when the Director, burdened with so many duties, forgets some little detail of a particular case, and the woman, balked of her information, or put off till that day week, will march sullenly from the room, across the yard, and into her ward and cell, where she will brood over her slight, till the strange impulse to do mischief overpowers her, and the broom, or the pewter pint, dashes away at the windows, until superior force is called in to carry her away to the penal ward.

Visits to the lady-superintendent are more frequent, and are chiefly made on account of their letters. They ought to have had a letter

—"oh! ever so long ago!"—has anything been heard of it—has it been mislaid, or kept back, or what?*

I remember one woman begging the superintendent for some extra-work, something to keep her constantly employed. "I am thinking too much now," she said; "everything comes to my mind to worrit me, and persuade me to break the windows,

* Prisoners are only allowed to receive letters once a month. If a letter arrives for a prisoner before a month has expired from the receipt of the last epistle, it is detained for the full term, unless there are news of a death, when it is given to the prisoner, with a special paper for a reply. Concerning these letters, Mr. Henry Mayhew, in his work, "The Great World of London," speaks. He tells of the delight of a woman whose turn to receive a letter has come, her gratitude to the matron who brings it, and her exultation over its news. But there is another side to the picture:—the state of excitement, and even dissatisfaction, into which many women fall after the reception of their letters—the "breakings out" that follow the reading—"the restless fever" to which they are subject—even the insolence to which they treat their officers, if any particular home-news have proved disagreeable to them. These letters are welcome missives to the prisoners; the days on which they are received are to be marked with a white stone by the women, but with a black one by the matrons in charge.

or tear my needlework. Give me something extra to keep me from thinking, or I'm sure to make a smash of it."

Of the minor troubles and the little crosses in prison life, the superintendent is also made the recipient, and by her tact, womanly kindness, and keen insight into prison character, soothes many a troubled spirit, and prevents many a threatened outburst.

"Seeing the superintendent" is also an occasional task, and sometimes an unpleasant duty, of the prison matrons. Their complaints are generally concerning little breaches of discipline and the infringement of small privileges: Miss B. ordering about Miss M.'s cleaning or coal women—Miss J. leaving a bolt unfastened or a door unlocked—Miss R. reporting Miss C., &c. Still, these matters are easily settled. Minor faults of omission are punished by deductions from the salary, and little differences on matters personal are speedily adjusted. There is very little quarrelling, and a wondrous amount of good feeling and fellowship, amongst this useful body.

"Seeing the doctor," is a pleasant variation from

prison routine, and a privilege of which the prisoners in large numbers avail themselves. All classes of women wish to see the doctor: women really ill; women anxious to persuade him that they are falling sick, and require convalescent diet and a change to the infirmary, where the living is good and the rules not severe; women with sham complaints, and often with extraordinary and ludicrous applications.

"I've got a pain, sir."

"Well, where is your pain?"

"Oh! all over me—creeps like. I think it's the work—them militingary trousers, sir."*

"Nonsense—nonsense!—you're well enough."

"I'm falling away, sir. Miss—— says she sees a difference herself in me. I should like to go to the infirmary, sir."

"I daresay you would."

"Or have a little lighter work."

The prisoner's plea is pronounced frivolous, and she is withdrawn, muttering her discontent. The matron calls from her book the name of the next

* The making of military trousers by the female prisoners has been long since discontinued.

prisoner, who steps out from the rank, gives her bonnet to one of her companions to hold, and crosses to where the doctor is sitting, to make her complaint. If she is passed on to the infirmary, she returns to the rank rejoicing, with the envious eyes of the other women following her.

The next applicant may make some such absurd statement as the following :—

"If you please, sir, I've got the toothache—such a racking toothache, sir; my poor head is fit to split."

The tooth is examined, perhaps some symptom of decay discovered, and a specific promised.

Still the woman is not quite satisfied—the root of the evil has not been struck at, and present relief is no cure for future torture.

"I know what the cause is, sir."

"What is it?"

"It's all the cocoa, sir. It's not so good as it used to be, and I'm sure it's the cocoa. I should like it changed, sir."

The doctor cannot see how cocoa could have affected this particular prisoner with the toothache, expresses his doubts, and the woman retires, more

firmly convinced of her own view of the case than ever.

One of the chief causes of complaint is any infirmity, spot, or blemish likely to affect the personal appearance. A whitlow requires immediate attention, and a sty in the eye engenders as much consternation as a pleurisy. The hair also is a subject of intense anxiety.

The following remarks are not at all unusual:—

"Will you be so good, sir, as to give me something to keep my hair from a-coming off? It ain't half so thick as it used to be, and I shall go out bald, sir, if you don't do something. It's a-coming out in handfuls."

Or—

"If you please, sir, I'm sorry to say that I found some grey hairs in my head last night. It never happened before, sir. It's all this dreadful prison that's turning me grey."

"I can't do anything, J."

"You can give me something to stop it, sir, I hope. It's very hard that I should be served like this. It isn't in the rules!" and muttering some-

thing about what her friends will think of her, she goes away dissatisfied.

So each woman in turn, with some complaint—one, perhaps, with the whitewash of the wall carefully laid on her tongue, or another with her gums pricked with a needle, to show how very ill she is. About two hours of the doctor's time are thus taken up every day with the study of these poor benighted creatures' ailings, real and fancied.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—CELESTINA SOMMER.

I PURPOSE to intersperse my sketches of prison life with portraits of the more remarkable characters that came beneath my own particular observation. Such glimpses of life apart from the world, I think, are worth the study, and will be interesting and instructive to the general reader.

In a future chapter I shall offer, under a feigned name, the history of one woman struggling to become better; in the present, without attempting to offer an analysis of the motives under which she acted, I venture to speak without disguise of one

whose name is not likely yet to be forgotten. Celestina Sommer, as the reader is probably aware, stood her trial for the murder of her daughter, on the 10th of April, 1856. The circumstances of the murder were peculiarly bold and cruel, and the sentence of the court was death—a sentence that, to the surprise and dissatisfaction of the public, was commuted to penal servitude for life; and the criminal, in due course, became an inmate of Millbank Prison, Westminster.

Celestina Sommer was a pale-faced, fair-haired woman, of spare form and below the middle height, a quiet and well-ordered prisoner, holding the other women in horror, and partial to her own cell and her work therein. Cool and self-possessed, possibly to a certain extent crafty, she soon passed from one stage to another without a report against her general behaviour, and was drafted, after eight or ten months, with other well-behaved women, to Brixton Prison, where the first signs of a deranged mind began to manifest themselves. Throughout the whole term of her incarceration at Millbank and Brixton Prisons, this quiet, grave-faced woman never betrayed any symptoms of remorse at the

awful character of a crime which has stamped her trial as one of the most remarkable *causes célèbres* of this country. A thoughtful though not a sullen woman, I do not believe that the reminiscence of that remorseless deed ever deeply affected her; it was the peculiar character of her madness to forget it, or at least to regard it as an event of no importance to her future welfare.

At Millbank, being once questioned as to her offence by the chaplain, who expressed a hope that she was truly penitent for the heinous crime she had committed, she answered very quickly and readily:—

"Oh! of course, I am very sorry! I say a great many prayers a-day, you know. Very sorry, very sorry indeed!"

The next instant she asked a question wholly irrelevant to the subject, and seemed anxious on a point of religion that did not apply to her particular case. Her religious questions were peculiarly wild and strange, and testified to the gradually weakening character of her mind.

At Brixton she adopted the same taciturn demeanour, showed the same objection to association,

and when the society of a fellow-prisoner was pressed upon her, seldom condescended to exchange a word with her. A great portion of her time was spent in the infirmary. In the airing ground of Brixton Prison, where the women walk in pairs, and are allowed to converse (a great contrast and a valued boon to the women who have served their ten or twelve months at Millbank), she preferred to walk alone, muttering strange words to herself. Prisoners are keen observers, and are quick to note the weakness, or the leading faults, of their unhappy cotemporaries. As a class they are strangely wanting in feeling one for another, and this poor, unhappy woman was a subject of amusement to some of them.

It was soon guessed that Celestina Sommer was "not all there," as the phrase runs; and in the airing-yard, when she was plodding on in the usual round, with her hands in the cuffs of her sleeves, and walking perhaps at a slower rate than the others, a woman would say,

"Now, Sommer, let us see how fast you can walk for a new apron."

And Celestina would start round the airing-

ground at an extraordinary rate, until, her movements attracting the attention of the officer in charge, she was stopped, remonstrated with on account of her eccentricities, and the other women reproved, and sometimes reported, for teasing her.

Of one thing this strange woman was inordinately vain—she had a firm conviction that her singing was perfection. When an infirmary patient she was fond of informing the other invalids that she had been one of the opera chorus before her marriage,* and had been a good singer from her childhood—a very good singer indeed!

"Well, let us hear you sing now," a woman would say, in the absence of the matron; and thus adjured, she would begin at once, in a clear, shrill voice, that rang throughout the infirmary, and into the adjoining offices, from which the infirmary matron had immediately to hasten to still the noise. In chapel, Celestina was orderly in all things save the exercise of her vocal powers. Her desire then appeared to be to drown the voices of

* Whether this assertion was true or not, I have had, of course, no opportunity of ascertaining. It was her own statement, many times repeated, and always with consistency.

the rest of the women, in which she generally succeeded to her own satisfaction, and to the infinite amusement of the prisoners. She kept very good time, and was quick to catch the air, but her notes were harsh and discordant, and grated on a sensitive ear. She appeared to be perfectly unconscious of attracting general attention by her singing, and intensely absorbed in her own manner of delivering the hymn. There was, indeed, an evident self-consciousness that she was performing it admirably, that, under circumstances less sad, would have been amusing to more eye-witnesses than the callous, unimpressionable beings round her at the time.

As her mind became more impaired, she became more forgetful of her duties, and oblivious of the prison discipline. Her health degenerated rapidly with her mind, and, in the latter days of her sojourn at Brixton, she seldom passed from the infirmary to her own cell.

At the conclusion of the chaplain's prayers in the infirmary one day, and almost before the last word had escaped him, she broke forth with—

"Yes, my married name is Sommer—but my

maiden name was ——" as though that were the fitting peroration to morning prayers in general.

During her stay at Brixton Prison she evinced great concern at no one calling to see her, and used to fret a great deal at this neglect, or seeming neglect, of attention on the part of those whom she thought dear to her. This was her only trouble whilst her mind retained any semblance of coherent ideas; but a time came when the true and the false—the real and the unreal—blended themselves inextricably together, and her removal to Fisherton Lunatic Asylum became a matter of necessity.

There are so many attempts to deceive the officers and surgeon by an assumed insanity, that on the first symptoms of any eccentricity of manner suspicion is generally aroused. Although this was not the case with Celestina Sommer, still it was necessary to make quite certain that no deceit was practised against the authorities, and hence the reason for her stay at Brixton longer than perhaps the reader has considered just or merciful.

She departed from Brixton to Fisherton,

where her unhappy life was brief enough. A sad end to as sad a story as ever darkened the pages of a history of crime. At any other period such a life would have ended at the gallows' foot, and one more weak, suffering woman would have answered for actions which—for God's mysterious and all-wise reasons—were wholly unaccountable.

He is an over-wise man who seeks to tell where crime ends and insanity begins. The line between them is drawn by the Great Hand, and can be distinguished by Him alone.

CHAPTER IX.

PRISONERS' VANITY.

"ALL is vanity," says the preacher; and even within the walls of a prison, where there is no incentive to the encouragement of this universal weakness, it is singular how the old failing, inherent in us from the days of Mother Eve, crops out in arid and unfriendly soil.

The great difference between the male and the female prisoners is this love of display under difficulties. It is a subject almost inexhaustible, and on which a whole volume could be written. Personal appearance is almost wholly disregarded

by the men; by the women it seems never forgotten for an instant, inciting them to breach of discipline and defiance of all rule, and making them bold and stratagetic. Checked too roughly, it leads to violent outbursts of temper that will throw a whole ward into confusion.

To check this vanity, to baffle the many means which prisoners find for their gratification in the indulgence of it, is one of the most trying and incessant tasks of the prison matron. There are times even, when, with a very vicious woman, who has no self-control, and whom physical restraint transforms into a wild beast rather than a human being, a little harmless variation in the arrangement of the hair or the style of the bonnet is tacitly overlooked.

There are some women at Millbank and Brixton Prisons who have undergone every method of punishment, who have defied, fought against, and worn out those that inflicted it, and who, with health impaired by constant severity, are still as reckless and dangerous as in the days when prison rules were new to them. Kindness, severity, moral reproof, have all been tried and failed, and dis-

ciplinarians of the strictest school can do no more with them. Such women are at last humoured by thoughtful prison matrons; there remains no other way to keep them quiet. This may be subversive —is to a certain extent subversive—of true discipline, but a strict observance of the rules would inevitably kill the woman, whose indomitable spirit would last to her dying day.

Therefore, when the case is not a flagrant one, when by a little toleration the desperate nature of the woman can be kept in the background, and her evil passions restrained, the matron will not dispute very much with her if she proceeds to the airing-ground with her bonnet on the back of her head, or her hair arranged in a method that she considers more becoming to her particular style of beauty or ugliness.

In a former chapter I have mentioned the case of a woman scraping the whiting from the walls on to her tongue; not a few of the prisoners make use of the same material to give a clearer appearance to their complexion. In my early days at Millbank Prison, I have a recollection of one woman raising the envy of her fellow-

prisoners, and startling the authorities, by the very brilliant colour on her cheeks. That her cheeks were painted there was little doubt—I do not think she attempted to deny it—and in the absence of any colouring matter in her cell or about the prison, the mystery gave rise to much speculation among the prison officers.

This woman kept her secret for some time, and it was only by careful watching that her plan of operation became at last apparent, giving evidence of considerable ingenuity to attain her ends. It is customary amongst the female prisoners to make the cotton shirts for the male convicts of Millbank —blue cotton shirts, with a red stripe crossing the texture. These stripes, it was afterwards ascertained, the woman had been in the habit of drawing upon, or carefully unravelling, until, a sufficient number of threads being obtained, they were soaked in water, an operation by which a colouring matter was procured, which, transferred to her cheeks, gave them that brilliance which so excited the envy of her fellow-prisoners.

Great geniuses invariably suffer from imitators; and the fact having become generally known

amongst the women, considerable extra-surveillance of the work became imperative. To this day colouring the face is a prevailing weakness amongst the female prisoners; and in their aprons there are a few red threads, which they contrive to make use of when any work from which an abstraction can be made is not forthcoming.

Probably the vainest woman at either of our female Government prisons was one of the name of Mary Ann Ball; a desperate character, with no small share of personal advantages—of which, by the way, she was perfectly conscious. At the time of her first appearance she was not more than nineteen or twenty years of age, and was a bold, handsome girl. As she will appear in my list of prison characters, I need not dwell upon her here at any length, save as illustrating very strikingly that ingenuity "to make the best of herself" under difficulties, to which I have alluded.

The shifts this Ball made use of to attain her ends astonished her cotemporaries. Among her many extraordinary devices were those for obtaining a full skirt; for which purpose she would appropriate the ropes of her hammock, or turn

the sheets of her bed into full petticoats. The rapidity with which a new prison dress would, the morning after its receipt, assume a fashionable appearance, was no less remarkable.

A prisoner's dress might certainly with advantage show more grace of outline, and if the waist were not immediately under the arm it would conduce to a more picturesque appearance. Ball was as conscious of these facts as any woman of an observant turn of mind could very well be, and did her best to remedy those governmental defects of style and errors of construction which she considered as peculiarly inelegant. I have known her receive a prison dress one night, and appear the next morning in a long-waisted, flowing robe that was the envy of the whole prison; while the tight-fitting pair of stays beneath that gave grace to her figure, considering that stay-bones were not allowed, was a marvel of construction.

It was a long time before Ball's persistence in these minor vanities wore out everyone's hopes of bringing her to a sense of the error of her ways. Report led to a breaking out and the disturbance of the whole prison; her temper being that of one

possessed by an evil spirit, and her strength that of a lioness. It became the rule to look leniently on the little indiscretions of Ball. A skilful matron would occasionally reason with her about her full skirts, and humour her out of too great an exhibition of her personal adornments. But if her dress was reduced to conformity with the prison rules, her hair, in all probability, would still be rolled. And if the arrangement of her hair was in harmony with the general style of the establishment, she would manage, even during the darkness of night, to turn her bonnet into some novel, perfectly original, and to herself satisfactory shape.

Ball was the originator of a peculiar kind of bandoline, compounded from the candle, which, in the prison wings of Brixton, is still the substitute for gas; and when misbehaviour had reduced her to the penal class, she contrived to make use of the wires—which, at the time I am writing of, were before the windows of penal class cells—to stiffen her stays, and serve as a substitute for "boning." As the wires were withdrawn only here and there, their disappearance was not immediately discoverable. Indeed, it was not till the ingenious Ball fainted

away in chapel one day, a victim to extra tight-lacing, that the misappropriation of the wires—the undue pressure of which had been the chief reason of her indisposition—was discovered, almost immediately after which they were removed from penal class cell windows.

Ball did more to turn the women's minds, and set them craving after the vanities of life, than all who had preceded her. The example she has left behind has never been forgotten, and I verily believe her ingenious inventions are transmitted from one set of women to another, with a regularity and a method worthy of a better cause.

In Millbank Prison, where the women have not so many opportunities of comparing notes, the same craving for a more becoming appearance asserts itself. During my stay at that prison, I remember passing a cell, the outer door of which had been left open one summer night, by order of the doctor, when I was startled by the appearance at the iron grating, of a figure in her night-dress —a poor delicate woman, who had turned from her bed to exchange a few words with me. I had a

candlestick in my hand at the time, and was passing to my own room, at the end of the ward.

"Lord bless you, miss!" whined the woman; "I'm so glad to see you to-night—I've something on my mind."

"You must not talk—you'll disturb the other women."

"I'll only whisper it—if you won't mind just a word, miss."

"Just a word" is a great boon—an everlasting favour conferred—with the more grateful of this class, and I went nearer the grating to hear her statement. Beginning in a low, lachrymose vein, intended to arouse my sympathy and interest in her coming relation, she suddenly darted a long naked arm through the grating, and hooked some of the melted tallow from the candle in my hand.

"It's on'y jist a scrap of tallow for my hair, miss," said she, applying it to that treasured ornament very rapidly with both hands; "it do get awful rough without fat, to be sure! And I'm very much obliged to you, miss. God bless you!"

And with a triumphant laugh at her own adroitness, she darted from the grating into her bed,

where, as I went down the ward to my room, I heard her chuckling to herself over her success.

Amongst the women at Millbank and Brixton there is a strange craving and an incessant appeal for hair-pins.

"If you'll only give me something to keep my hair decent, mum," they say; and unless the hair-pin is given—a gratuity for which prison rules make no allowance—many a woman will appear at chapel with her hair in disorder, and, by her untidiness, bring on the matron a reprimand from the superintendent. The matrons are responsible for the decent appearance of their women; but it appears never to have suggested itself to the authorities that women's hair *will* grow, and that hair pins and back-combs are *desiderata* without which a neat and tidy woman is almost an impossibility. Under these circumstances, the common sense of the matrons constitutes a law for itself, and there is scarcely a woman without a back-comb and a hair-pin or two. String, however, is generally supposed to keep the hair in proper order. Pieces of glass are also as much in request with these women as with a tribe of savages. A woman will break

a window for a piece of glass, secure the largest piece in her bed, and mourn over the seeming accident with a display of feeling verging on the histrionic. This accident is often excused, and the cell searched for all the pieces. As a rule, despite the most rigid scrutiny, the woman contrives to conceal one piece. With a background to her glass—a black piece of cloth filched from her work, or the smoke from the gas or candle in her cell—she contrives an apology for a looking-glass, and guards her treasure with jealous care. The possession of a trifle of this kind will often keep the worst woman patient for many weeks—the confiscation thereof will transform her into a fury.

The women at the prisons have a great objection to the regulation bonnets—large straw bonnets, destitute of trimming, whose peculiar poke-shape would disgust a septuagenarian char-woman. On the other hand, they have quite a love for their caps, which they have an idea become them exceedingly well. The caps of the Brixton prisoners, indeed, are neat little ones, with crimped borders—a striking contrast to the "mobs" of the Millbank women.

Great pains are taken with their caps by the majority of prisoners; and the same ingenuity to make the best of everything is manifested in the sly alterations by which they bring them into conformity with their taste. There is quite a series of fashions during the year with them. One woman will start a new border, or new tucks and pleats behind, with the introduction perhaps of a piece of wire for the better shape thereof; and the fashion, if generally approved of, will be immediately imitated by her companions.

To such an extent was the love of display carried, that the Director threatened, if the caps were not left in their original shape, and if they were subjected to such constant alterations and amendments, that white night-caps should be substituted in their place—a terrible threat, which convulsed the prisoners with horror, and, had it been carried out, would probably have excited such a mutiny as the Directors had never had to contend with.

Fortunately for the proper regulation of the prison, the threat was not carried into execution; and the women, I believe, wear the same caps to this day. So, in the midst of this

grim prison life, and the duties appertaining to it, the woman's love for dress, and the natural desire to make the best of her appearance, flash out at times, and are not to be kept down. Vanity in a prison cell, and behind an iron grating, but still the same passion that dresses My Lady in silks and satins, and sows the diamonds in her hair.

CHAPTER X.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—"TIB."

TIB, we may remark, was the cant name given by prisoners, and occasionally by prison officers, to a strange, half-witted girl, sentenced to a term of four years' penal servitude for larceny. As she has left the prison, and, report says, has been married to a respectable costermonger — I am inclined to doubt this report myself—I will not speak of her by her real name, but use her cant appellative.

Tib was about nineteen years of age. Her personal appearance was that of a lumpish girl, of short stature, with a scared expression on a one-sided countenance, that should have been her excuse before any jury in the world. Still she was a sprightly, high-spirited girl, possessed of considerable strength, and in a paroxysm of passion was capable of running the whole gamut of the Billingsgate vernacular. Her strange fits of temper, and utter defiance of prison rules, rendered her a sore trial to the matrons, and made her sojourn in the dark cells, refractories, and penal wards of Millbank an everyday occurrence.

Tib was always in trouble; she made few friends, for she was as abusive and quarrelsome with her fellow-prisoners as with the officers. When she was in a bad temper, she would tear up sheets, and smash the windows with pints, until the canvas jacket was put on her; when she was in a good temper her pranks were more those of a monkey than of a human being at any age.

A favourite amusement of Tib's, when proceeding to chapel, was to tread on the heels of the

woman preceding her, pull her hair or the back of her bonnet, thrust playfully a pin into any part of her person that might be handy for the purpose, and almost choke herself with suppressed laughter at the indignation aroused. In chapel it was a matter of impossibility to keep her decorous; she would shift uneasily in her seat, fidget with her feet, drop her hymn-book, whisper frequently to her neighbour, stand up at unreasonable periods, or struggle hard with the next woman—who perhaps had sought to bring her back to her seat by jerking at the skirt of her dress.

Her power of grimace was something remarkable. Her facial contortions would convulse a whole ward with laughter.

Her conversation was rational enough at times, but all the preaching at her or praying with her, the moral reflections of chaplain and Scripture-readers, the earnest efforts of the prison matrons, superintendent, and even of the governor, to keep her steady, proved entirely nugatory. Tib would promise anything with the gravest face and the most vehement protestations, and half-an-hour afterwards forget the circumstance, and be as

uproarious and unruly as ever. Sheer wantonness seemed more often the incentive to her various eccentricities than any violent ebullition of temper; she was easily "put out," but even when she was not in the state so described, her behaviour was about the same.

"It's such a jolly breeze, miss!" she would say, exultingly, as she danced about her cell after breaking all her windows, smashing her table, strewing the floor with fragments of sheets, blankets, and rug, and winding up with an onslaught on her own personal apparel; "have the men been sent for yet?"

The men *had* been sent for, and presently they would arrive, and away went Tib to the dark cell, fighting, shrieking, and laughing all the way. On her term of "durance vile" coming to an end, she would return rather more pale and weak to her cell, and, after a day or two's rest, recommence all her old tricks.

In the airing-yard she was the leading comedian of her division—dancing, shuffling, hopping, doing anything but walking in that staid manner required of prisoners during the recreation hour.

As she made a feint of passing the matron in a very orderly manner, the more experienced officer who might be on duty chose to ignore her minor escapades. She had long ago been given up as unteachable and unmanageable; and it was only extra misbehaviour that shut her in the dark, or put her canvas jacket on.

During the winter time one day, in the airing-yard at Millbank, I remember the heavy snow of some two or three days previous had been swept on each side of the path, forming two banks of snow, between which the women proceeded one-by-one, Tib prancing along in her turn after the old fashion, giving mischievous pushes behind to the prisoner in advance, and indulging in little suppressed shrieks of laughter whenever the foot of the woman, taken off her guard, went deep into the snow.

"Don't do that again, or I'll send you silly with a back hander," muttered the woman at last.

"Why, Egan, it don't hurt?"

"Don't do it again."

"I would not mind jumping in it, head over heels, I would not!"

"Let's see you."

"Wait till we've passed Miss F——, and see if I don't, if you dare me."

"I dare you, Tib!"

The women passed along the path swept at an earlier hour by the male prisoners, round by the wall, back again past the matron, shivering in her bear-skin; the news spreading, mysteriously and swiftly, to the very end of the line, that Tib was going to jump into the snow-bank.

And when the women were all on the watch, Tib kept her word, and, giving a sudden rush from the ranks, took "a header" into the snow, completely disappearing for a moment, amidst the shrieks and uproarious laughter of her companions.

In such moments of hilarity, which are grave breaches of discipline, the matron calls "All in!" at once, and curtails the hour's promenade. For this pantomimic feat on the part of Tib, the "ward" was sent in-doors, and the key

turned on each woman. I believe Tib was reported for this offence, but very lightly punished, as her good tempers had set in, and it was considered advisable not to interfere too much with her.

During the latter days of Tib's stay at Millbank she began to show many signs of improvement, thanks to the care of a thoughtful matron under whose charge she was placed. This matron was a fair judge of character, and adopted a different method with the incorrigible Tib. She conceived the idea of a special treatment applicable to her case, and with considerable gentleness and tact gradually mollified the hitherto ungovernable woman. She reasoned with her, even humoured her out of her most violent intentions, gave her all that kind advice which, without infraction of the rules, a prison matron can offer to a prisoner, and finally developed in Tib a trait of character for which no one at Millbank gave so unruly a creature credit. Tib began to evince gratitude for the interest shown in her, and gradually

yielded to the influence of kindness. She would be concerned at even a temporary absence of her favourite officer, for whom she demonstrated a wild, passionate affection. She would submit to her orders, but refused to obey those of anybody else. This was an improvement, however, and that particular ward wherein she was a prisoner became quite a different place, now Tib had become a different being.

This is a remarkable instance of what may be effected by a clever matron, who can exercise patience, judgment, and gentleness in her treatment of a prisoner.

The attempt to tame this woman was as doubtful an experiment as the taming of a wild beast, and yet the matron by a little perseverance succeeded in her object. Sir Joshua Jebb has very wisely drawn a distinction between the treatment of male and female prisoners: "Male convicts must be treated in masses rather than according to their individual character. Individuality must be more regarded with female convicts." If this advice

were more constantly borne in mind by the matrons, much good would inevitably follow. It is the treating in masses—the want of judgment in a matron, here and there, to distinguish the true method, to say the right word in the right place, to vary the application of the rules according to the different characters of the prisoners, that brings about much inevitable harm. When a matron shows judgment in these matters—and it is but fair to say that she very often does—she becomes a valuable servant of the State. When the gift of discretion is wanting, she does more harm to true discipline than a refractory woman.

The affection of Tib became rather embarrassing to the matron, it was so demonstrative and exacting. She became jealous if any remarks were made to other prisoners, and was always threatening to break out if Miss —— spoke to that ugly Edmonds or that brute Pugh. Still she only threatened, and a word or smile from the favourite officer kept her in check.

When the matron fell sick for a few days, Tib's

passion burst out again, and brought her to the refractory; and it was only in consequence of her threat never to be quiet again, if she were not returned to the same ward, that it was thought advisable to transfer her to her old quarters.

Early in the summer, the matron took her leave of absence. Before her departure she had a little talk with Tib—expressed her hope that she would be a good girl during her absence, and told her how grieved she should be to find her again amongst the refractories on her return.

"Do you mean to say ye'd really be sorry now? Upon your word and honour!"

"Upon my word, I should."

"Then I won't break out till ye come back," she said, with her usual half-idiotic laugh; "I won't have a single report—I'll be so precious good!

And she kept her word. On the matron's return, Tib was in the same cell, working diligently, and earning a better name than her antecedents had appeared likely to warrant.

"I told ye I'd keep good, miss. Oh! I've had such mighty hard work to do it though!" she exclaimed.

At chapel every morning Tib insisted upon carrying the matron's prayer-book, and was grave and decorous all the service if allowed to sit by her side, furtively holding the fringe of her shawl in her hand. Hers was almost the affection of an animal for a kind mistress, and the jealousy with which she resented any approach of another prisoner to her favourite officer partook of the same character.

Tib, finally, behaved so well, that the order for her transmission to Brixton was made out—her time having expired, and her conduct during the past few months having rendered her eligible for that agreeable change.

She received the news with anything but gratification. The order for Brixton might have been her death-warrant for all the satisfaction she exhibited.

"I won't go, miss," she said, confidentially; "I'll never go to Brixton, mind!"

"But you'll have so much liberty there; and association too, Tib."

Tib anathematized the extra liberty and the association with a vehemence that testified still to

a deficiency of moral restraint, and took a few oaths on the spot, before the matron could check her, that no earthly force should remove her from Millbank.

That night, or the next day, she smashed every pane of glass in her cell, demolished her table, tore her sheets and blankets, took to singing extempore songs denunciatory of the governor, superintendent, and chaplain, and, as a matter of course, was removed in the old fashion to the "dark." The reason for her breaking out was reported to the authorities, and after some consideration it was resolved that she should be passed over to Brixton, despite her attempt to evade the change, and so her *ruse* proved unavailing for the nonce.

"Never mind," were Tib's last words; "if they won't let me stop with my dear Miss —— now, I'll find my way back. They can take me there," she added, cunningly; "but the devil's in me if they can make me stop!"

And accordingly she began her old plan of action immediately upon her arrival at the Surrey prison—breaking windows, tearing blankets, indulging in the most blasphemous language,

even fighting with the woman put in association with her, and winding up by flinging her pewter pint at the matron's head. Tib was pronounced incorrigible, unworthy the company of the better-disposed women, and packed back to Millbank to learn better behaviour for the future.

She was again placed on probation, and by degrees worked her way back to the ward of which her favourite matron held possession. Her first words were—

"I said I'd come back!" before she burst into tears at the sight of the friendly matron's face.

Tib oscillated between Millbank and Brixton during the remainder of her sentence—obedient at Millbank, and altogether unruly at the latter prison.

Brixton officers attempted the Millbank matron's style of treatment with her, but wholly failed. The superintendent reasoned with her in vain—Tib would remain constant to her first love, and would have no kindness or favour from any one else. She worked her time and went away.

A few months after her departure, an old prisoner made her reappearance at Millbank to undergo a new sentence.

"I suppose you haven't forgotten Tib?" was her inquiry on first meeting with Tib's old officer.

"Oh! no! I have not forgotten her."

"She's gone and got married to a coster-monger."

"She's doing well, I hope?"

"She's a-going on about the same as usual. You'll have her back before a couple of months."

The prophecy, however, has not come true yet. But old faces do come back, and take their places in our midst; and such weak sisters as Tib are almost certain to appear again—governed by a nature that exults in non-repentance, and swayed by the fierce impulse that drives them on to wrong. Still Tib has *not* appeared yet, and it is fair,—it is merciful,—to hope ever for the best.

CHAPTER XI.

"BREAKINGS OUT."

In the preceding pages, I have alluded so much to what is termed "breaking out," and shall, as a matter of necessity, have to allude so often to it in my future illustrations of prison life, that it may be as well, before proceeding further, to devote a little time to a description of its manifold workings and results, that we may see if any glimpse of the true reasons for these frequent outbursts can be ascertained. "Breaking out," which is peculiar to English female prisons,

is altogether distinct from the raving and violence of the inmates of a lunatic asylum, and appears very often to be a motiveless frenzy.

In 1859 the governor of Millbank Prison, in his Report, appears to regard it as an insolvable mystery.

"I am satisfied," he writes to the Directors of Government Prisons, "that every inducement consistent with discipline is held out to these unfortunate but unreasonable creatures, whose conduct at times is quite unaccountable, and trying to those placed over them."

Superintendents and chaplains appear to take the same view. Kindness, good-feeling, interest, encouragement to good, are exhibited in vain; amongst a certain class of women it appears as much a necessity to act in a manner utterly at variance with common sense and decency, as it is to breathe and live.

I think we should go a little deeper than the surface to account for these violent displays of temper, and consider the prisoners' probable nature and habits, before the pri-

son gates, clanging upon them, shut them from society. Freedom with them was the liberty of the wild beast—free to roam anywhere, uncared for and unchecked; left to wander in the darkness, without one helping hand stretched forth to lead them to a brighter life; no honest example ever before them; but the path of evil they were to follow, clearly indicated by all with whom their lives were brought into contact. Evil and crime must follow in due course from the awful ignorance, almost brute-like in its character, which characterizes these women.

Amongst the statistics with which the prison reports bristle there is always one sad proof of the ignorance prevailing;—as shown in the following tabular form, taken from the report of 1859:—

Ignorant.	Can read only.	Both imperfectly.	Both well.
Females 93	104	105	22
Juveniles 3	1	2	...

The worst women are found amongst those that come under the first category. From the last we obtain our model prisoners. The former com-

prises the greater number of the penal class, who, in the same report, are distinguished, according to their behaviour, as good, bad, or indifferent. How grim are the facts disclosed by these figures, insensibly reminding one of the Gradgrind school of explanation.

	Good.	Indifferent.	Bad.
Penal Class.	4	8	33

Possibly, thanks to this age of education, the prison books of future days will not contain so much to show the fruits of this soul-besetting ignorance. Ignorance is the mother of crime, and when

> "There's not a crime
> But takes its proper change out still in crime,
> If once rung on the counter of the world—"

the terrible result is easily guessed at.

Ignorance is in a great degree accountable for these breakings out. There is no reasoning with women in whom reason appears to be little more than a brute instinct. Long years of evil courses have so hardened their hearts that they are almost impenetrable to the benevolent attempts made to

work a change in them. Their lessons have only been learned in the Devil's school, and that evil master burns his letters in.

Ignorance, however, is not always sufficient to explain the conduct of breakers out. Here and there a woman who has been carefully brought up, who can read and write well, who has had good parents and wise counsellers, and yet has gone wrong, follows the example of her disorderly companions, and becomes as unruly as the rest. Amongst the more educated female class beyond our prisons are there not ungovernable tempers, rash hands to destroy in a passion the valuable and fragile? Shakspere, at the head of the portrait-painters of our poor humanity, has shown us one or two. In prison the example of breaking out is displayed so often, and the monotony becomes, to a wild spirit, so wearisome and heart-breaking, that to disturb the stillness of their dreary abode, and to give some animation to the unvarying round of their enforced duties, the offence is committed, and the glass is shivered by the pewter pints!

One break out is almost sure to be followed by another; for the pulse beats high in these caged

natures, and their blood is soon warmed by tumult and excitement.

One matron, of a somewhat impulsive disposition—who has since left the service—once told me in confidence, and with a comical expression of horror on her countenance, that she was afraid she should break out herself, the temptation appeared so irresistible.

"I have been used to so different a life—father, mother, brothers, and sisters, all round me, light-hearted and happy—that it's like becoming a prisoner oneself to follow this tedious and incessant occupation. I assure you, Miss ——, that when I hear the glass shattering, and the women screaming, my temples throb, my ears tingle, and I want to break something,—dreadfully!"

I believe I have already remarked that some of these "breakings out" are parts of a cool, deliberate attempt to obtain removal to a dark or refractory cell, adjacent to a favourite companion who has recently committed a similar offence. At both prisons madness is very often feigned, and windows and tables are broken for the sake of fellowship both night and day; and occasionally there

are suspicions of unfair treatment, slights and jealousies, to render the woman's actions somewhat consistent with her feelings. With the malicious, it is a morbid satisfaction to destroy prison property. "I'll serve 'em out for putting me in here!" is often the remark with which an act of wholesale damage is accompanied.

In one year at Millbank Prison, one hundred and fifty-four cases of destruction of prison property occurred; and there are some women so desperately wicked—so resolved to resist all efforts to make them less abandoned or intemperate than they have always been—that it is often necessary to lay four or five reports in the course of a week, for two months in succession, before the superintendent, in order to keep up anything like a semblance of discipline in the wards to which these women belong.

In former days, women were contented with tearing their blankets into a few strips; but as these fragments were available for "prison flannels," it became a general rule to devote a little more time to the work of demolition, so as to make quite certain that the infinitesimal portions should render no further service to the State. In the refractory cells

the custom of tearing up a pair of blankets a night became so general, and this studied demolition entailed so important an item in the prison expenses, that it was suggested by a late deputy-superintendent of Millbank, that sacking sheets, stitched with string, which would baffle all destructive propensities, should be used. The demolition of these being a trying ordeal for the finger-nails, they answered well for a time, until one woman, more crafty than her fellow-prisoners, made a feint of destroying her dinner-can, and concealing one strip of the metal, which she sharpened during the night, with this murderous instrument she cut up the sacking with great exultation, and called attention to her success in the morning.*

Some of the boldest women even make attempts to set their cells on fire when the gas is lighted, and have so far succeeded, as to have conceived great fear of being roasted alive before help arrived, and have therefore startled the whole prison with their clamours for release.

* It may be added that this incident occurred through a breach of the rules on the part of the prison matron, no prisoner being allowed a tin dinner can in a refractory or dark cell.

The strength of some of these women, during their fits of frenzy, is greatly in excess of the men's. It always requires two, very often three, of the guards to force one fighting, plunging woman from her cell to the "dark;" tables and bedsteads snapping under their hands like splints of firewood. One woman named McWilliams—a woman of small stature, but of extraordinary strength—succeeded one night at Brixton in wrenching the inner door of a dark cell completely off its hinges.

The same woman, in concert with two other desperate prisoners, was agent in a studied plan for breaking out at Brixton, that caused considerable astonishment and damage. The ringleader was a woman of the name of Mary Nicholas, of a treacherous and vindictive character, who, having an objection to being passed over to the Wing, resolved to have a break out in consequence, and to lead others into the same mischief as herself. McWilliams, who was going to the Wing also, preferring her old quarters, the plan was first arranged between her and Nicholas, the third woman being afterwards enlisted as an able and willing recruit to aid them in their scheme. McWilliams and

Nicholas on one occasion were carrying water through the ward, when an opportunity for action seemed suddenly to present itself. The ward adjacent was being ventilated, and the cells being vacant at the time, the officer in charge of the prisoners had entered one for an instant, when Nicholas suddenly closed the door upon her—thus, as it opened only on the outside, rendering her confinement there for a few minutes imperative. Taking advantage of these few minutes, the two women made a dash down the ward, smashing every window in their way, enlisting the recruit already mentioned, who lent her willing services, the matron all the time rattling away at her cell door, and calling out for assistance. Three women intent on breaking windows can soon create formidable havoc; and every pane of the two wards —the occupied and the unoccupied—being shortly shivered, they turned their attention to the windows of the empty cells of the ward under process of ventilation, and darting from one to another, rapidly destroyed all their windows.

The first matron who came upon this scene of demolition proved herself an able officer; for,

following close upon the footsteps of the three women, she allowed them to rush into the empty cells, and managed to close the doors upon two of them—thus caging them, as the prisoners had previously caged the matron. By this time assistance had arrived; the riot was suppressed, and its fomenters were speedily secured.

I believe this is the most wholesale case of "smashing" preserved in prison records; close on three hundred and fifty panes of glass having been destroyed by these destructive hands. It was a grand breaking out, an exploit of which, I have no doubt, those women are proud to this day, and which is probably related as a pleasant anecdote of their prison experience to those friends and acquaintances to whom they have returned.

Some women are very methodical in their "breakings out." I remember one desperate woman, named McDermot, who, having first smashed her windows, was caught in the usual act of destroying her blanket, by the men, who had arrived rather more promptly than she had anticipated.

"Hollo!" was her salutation; "you're in a

hurry this morning! Just wait, there's good fellows, till I've finished my blanket. I won't keep you more than half a minute."

And having finished her blanket, as the circulars say, "with promptitude and despatch," she allowed herself to be led off to the "dark" like a lamb.

I think I may venture to suggest here that the treatment of the male officers to these wild demented creatures of my sex might at times be a trifle more gentle. There are some male officers who can keep their temper after a scratch down the cheeks, or in face of the resistance generally made to their efforts to remove a prisoner; but there are others, not few and far between, who are cruel and vindictive, using their giant's strength tyrannously, and like a giant. This is my opinion at least, and years of prison service have given me an opportunity of judging. Perhaps these few remarks may lead the "heads of office" to ask present matrons their opinion on the subject.

I may mention another memorable instance of violence, accompanied with method, which occurred at Millbank Prison. A woman, after committing the usual amount of damage with glass, sheets,

and blanket, contrived very ingeniously to keep out the officers by barricading the door with table, bedstead, &c., and, by the addition of her own weight, prevented it from being opened inwards for a considerable time.*

Another woman, adopting a similar method of defence, armed herself in addition with the leg of the table which she had demolished, and administered some very stout raps on the heads of the male officers when they broke at last into her cell.

All these acts are the angry waves upon the turbulent sea of prison life; the waves that are never still, but are for ever rolling against the barriers, and breaking into spray. Such waves there is no stilling—they overflow the barriers that prison discipline would oppose to them. They defy all rules—they are signs of the nature that, knowing no law, has blindly followed the impulse of its own awful passions, and can brook no restraint even when in the grasp of superior power.

Hurried as by a will beyond their own—impelled by a force that seems bestowed

* The doors of Millbank cells open inwards, those of Brixton outwards.

upon them to work evil in the hour of their desperation—we can but wonder at, or pity and pray for these wild natures. The power to help them—to turn them from their lawless course—in most cases is beyond us.

CHAPTER XII.

"THE DARK."

By way of sequel to the preceding chapter, I will devote the present to a few remarks on the punishment that follows the breaking out of refractory women.

The dark cells are six in number at Millbank Prison; at Brixton there are really none, but there are sixteen refractory cells, which are termed the penal ward. A few of these cells, possessing a less amount of accommodation than the others, have perforated

gratings in lieu of windows, and by prisoners and prison officers are generally known as "the darks." For the sake of generality, I will term them "darks" when speaking of either prison, in the present chapter.

Four of the dark cells at Millbank, in a kind of lobby, apart from the prisoners' wards, are firmly secured by formidable doors and iron gratings, and are covered by a sliding pad, the size of the outer door, which tends in a great degree to stifle the uproarious sounds that generally proceed from them, until the woman from sheer exhaustion flings herself on the ground, or coiling herself in her two blankets and rug, falls asleep on her sloping plank of a couch to dream the battle over again.

The furniture of a dark cell mainly consists of a slanting series of boards by way of bedstead, with an uncomfortable wooden block for a pillow — hard quarters for the worst of women, and, with a bread and water diet, telling rapidly upon a prisoner's health.

Some of the dark cells are, with an ingenious perversion of common humanity, placed either above, below, or beside the matron's quarters. At Millbank the cell is immediately below; and the tired officer is sometimes kept awake all night by that incessant shrieking, hammering, kicking, and singing in which the confined woman indulges while a spark of strength remains in her system.

This system of slow torture is termed by the inmates of the dark cells, "keeping it up while the screws are in bed."

It is a striking proof of the power of habit, that even the prison matrons become accustomed to this trial of their nerves. The ordeal to be passed through, however, before the nerves are sufficiently strung or the senses deadened, is a painful one, and not a few break down under it; but constant contiguity with the prisoners gradually produces its effect, and a woman in the dark cells becomes a matter of little concern. It is an event that happens every day; the noises in the night are to be expected and prepared against; and the matron, tired with her

long duties, is glad to find herself under any circumstances in her welcome bed.

If the prisoner is more than usually vociferous, the matrom turns a little more restlessly in her bed — wakes up suddenly, and listens for a while, perhaps to make sure that nothing unusual has occurred; and then drops off again to dream of the home she once had —of the friends that were round her in the old time, and who little dreamed that her proud spirit would ever seek this profession rather than be a burden to them — of the mother's face looking in upon her trouble, and so like the life it quitted years ago! whilst, mingling with her dreams, the thump, thump of the prisoner's feet and hands continue with incessant monotony, or the defiant song of the caged tigress wells up from her cell.

The diet of a woman in the dark cells is generally bread and water—unless her health has been already greatly impaired; and this treatment is continued, according to the nature of her offence, unless any sudden signs of ill-health

present themselves. I cannot say from my own experience that these "darks" have ever produced in any single instance a salutary effect upon the prisoner, although it is difficult to suggest a more proper mode of punishment. A remnant of the barbarous style of coercion peculiar to the middle ages, it is generally found to be unavailing for any good purpose. In the case of the strong it only proves that the woman has the power to tire out her punishers; while with the weak, constant and strict confinement is found speedily to affect the mind.

Every precaution is taken with the prisoners in the "dark." They are carefully watched and constantly visited. The night officer on duty has to pass each cell once an hour, and make sure that the woman is well; and the surgeon visits her once a-day.

Meanwhile, as a general rule, the prisoner continues defiant till the last. Every night a pair of blankets and a rug are given in to her —every morning the blankets are found torn

to shreds, and very often the rug, which is of tough material, and more trying to the fingers. The food which is given in to her is tossed out again, and the water flung in the matron's face. The singing and raving continue till she is entirely exhausted. The length of time in the "dark" varies considerably. With some women the maximum punishment is two days, however heinous may have been the offence; with more powerful prisoners, I have known twenty-eight days borne with perfect indifference. Nevertheless, confinement there tells at last upon all; none can struggle long against it.

During my service at Millbank Prison, there occurred a humorous incident connected with these dark cells. It became known amongst the prisoners that they were full of refractory women, and that any more "smashing" must perforce place the delinquents in temporary association. Millbank Prison, as the reader is aware, being mainly conducted on the silent system, there is, amongst some of the women, a great inducement to break out. If bread and water and

a dark cell are not agreeable, a companion to talk, plot, and compare notes with is desirable! In this instance the windows were shivered right and left for the sake of future companionship; and, for the tranquillity of the ward in which these outbreaks occurred, so many women were carried from their cells to the "dark" and the refractories, that there were two—in some cases three—in each cell.

It happened that, from one particular dark cell adjoining a portion of the pentagon belonging to the men's prison, the most piteous screams and cries for help were suddenly heard to issue. The matron in attendance hurried to the "dark," and found its three inmates huddled together, shivering and horrified.

"What is the matter?—what are you calling for?" she inquired.

"Oh! miss, for the Lord's sake, let us out! We'll never smash again—we'll behave ourselves so well!"

"What is the matter?"

"Oh! there's the devil in the next cell behind here. I am sure the devil is coming to

fetch us all away! There he is again!—oh, Lord, have mercy upon us!"

And, sure enough, there issued from immediately behind the dark cell a series of the most awful screams and yells that had ever escaped human throats. They even alarmed the matron, who was accustomed to these paroxysms of passion; they expressed at once fear, horror, and agony, and were unlike any human cries that had ever been heard in Millbank Prison. A legion of hyenas could not have given vent to noises more unearthly, and the women, adding their shrieks to the general tumult, implored to be released.

A messenger was sent round to the men's prison to learn the reason for so unusual an occurrence, and presently the mystery was cleared up. Some Chinese prisoners, who had arrived, had been forced to succumb to the general system of hair-cutting, despite their energetic protests to the contrary. The cherished tails had been mercilessly shorn off amidst their screams and shrieks; and it was their cries of lamentation over this calamity that had so alarmed the prisoners

in the cell adjoining the room wherein the operation had been performed.

There are exceptions to the general conduct of the prisoners in the "dark." Women will occasionally grow tired of singing, jumping, and blaspheming; and in those cells where a ray or two of light can enter, becoming weary of their stay there, they will beg humbly and earnestly for work, for the leaf of a tract, or for something to relieve the awful monotony of their listless inaction.

One woman, named Honor Matthews, the most desperate and abandoned of a desperate class, once refused to leave the "dark" when her time had expired, flung herself on the floor, and announced her intention to remain there. The "dark" suited her; she should break out directly she was put into her old cell, or attempt some one's life—threats which she swore to execute as soon as a favourable opportunity for committing either of these acts occurred.

The woman's stay in the "dark" had been a long one, but there was no help for it, save to submit to her continuance there. She was

one of the worst characters in the prison—unteachable, intractable, and malicious. The door of the dark cell closed upon her again, and day after day passed—even week after week—without any signs of her altering her determination. The usual prison food was given her each day—I am not quite certain that even extra food was not allowed—and every inducement urged to prevail upon her to return to her customary duties.

The matron in attendance had a favourite little kitten, which was accustomed to follow her about the wards; and it chanced that, in opening the door to attend to this woman, the kitten concealed itself in the cell, and was locked up with the prisoner.

This feline intruder would have been hailed as a welcome guest by most women under the same circumstances; but this prisoner had never shown any affection for a living thing within the prison walls. The kitten was missed, and search made for it. The woman in the dark cell maintained she had seen nothing of it—"What made any one think she knew about the kitten?"

The cell was opened, and the little animal found suffocated. "That's how I should like to serve the whole of you," growled the heartless wretch.

The woman finished her time at Brixton Prison and went her way. Contrary to general expectation, her name has not hitherto appeared in the list of "returns."

CHAPTER XIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—A MOUSE-TAMER.

THE character that I shall attempt to sketch in the present chapter, I will distinguish by the fictitious name of Seymour. She was one of the short-sentenced women, and has passed from the prison, in all probability never to return. I believe she is with her friends again, and it is not my purpose to make any parade of names, the publication of which might, unconsciously to me, pain friends, relations, or acquaintances.

Seymour was a lady prisoner. A systematic system of swindling shopkeepers, in which she was aided by her lady-like manners, was discovered after the old fashion, and she made her appearance at Millbank to serve some years of penal servitude.

Her manners at all times verged on the eccentric; and it was the opinion of many of the matrons that her mind was somewhat affected. She was singular in her habits, had a peculiar style of wearing her bonnet and shawl, and held herself strictly aloof from the other prisoners. She exhibited a fair amount of attention to her prison duties, escaped mention in all reports, and was one of those prisoners who give no trouble, and are easy to manage—one of the best class of women. She was rather partial to complaining against the other prisoners for insulting her, and was constantly suggesting alterations of prison rules, etc., to any matron who would favour her by listening to her plans.

With her fellow-prisoners she had a pitying way that was to them particularly aggravating, while to prison matrons she was condescending and patronizing. Her capabilities of "talking

over" were something totally out of the common.

Her Bible knowledge, and her anxiety to argue on Scriptural points of doctrine, made a favourable impression on a few of those who were most easily deceived. She was always open to conviction on any point, she affirmed; she was only anxious to be thoroughly enlightened, and to awake to the knowledge of the truth! My own impression has always been that Seymour was a hypocrite; that a visionary idea of becoming a "pet prisoner" had suggested from the outset her peculiar line of conduct. In words she professed to be truly penitent; but the hardness and even indifference of her manner, in the absence of the chaplain or Scripture reader, inspired doubts as to the reality of her conversion. Moreover, as at Brixton Prison she gave up talking of religion altogether—save at times repeating a chapter or two of the Testament by heart, to show her powers of memory—I have always considered that I have good grounds for making this assertion.

At Brixton Prison she continued her objections to her fellow-prisoners—"those poor

abandoned creatures," as she termed them—declined association when it was in her power; and when favoured with a companion, treated the wondering woman to a lengthened detail of the respectability of her connections. It was at Millbank, however, that her mouse-taming accomplishments showed themselves first. Her affection for mice and sparrows was intense. One mouse, which she invariably termed "my friend," was accustomed to make his appearance from a hole at her call, and take his place, during the dinner hour, on the table, whereon he would be regaled with crumbs from her six-ounce loaf. I have looked through "the inspection" of her cell more than once, and seen this strange companion at his meals,—timid and panting, nibbling at the crumbs strewn before him, even taking them from the prisoner's hand, though ready to dart away at the first alarm. Seymour had a peculiar call for the mouse, to which it always responded; and as the intimacy increased, "my friend" gathered greater confidence, and would perch on her shoulder, or run up and down her sleeve.

"My friend" placed itself entirely at her disposal after a little while, and Seymour was accustomed to take it to church in the bosom or sleeve of her dress, and to talk of her friend's health or appetite, and of the effect the weather had on its constitution.

During the absence of Seymour from the cell one day, a spiteful prisoner imitated her call, brought the inconsiderate mouse on the table, seized it, and—*bit its tail off!*

"My friend" did not respond so readily to the call after this outrage to its dignity, and it was some hours before Seymour discovered the ravages made on her little companion's personal appearance. Then her indignation and horror knew no bounds.

"Miss ——! some brute has taken off my friend's tail!" she screamed to the matron. "It's an infamous and cowardly action, and I hope you'll report it to the lady-superintendent. I demand to know who has been in my cell during my absence. I have a right to know, Miss, and I hope you'll make every inquiry."

"Miss ——," was her next salutation, "have you mentioned about my friend yet?"

"Not yet, Seymour."

"Then I'll see the deputy-superintendent* myself. Put my name down, if you please. My friend has been subjected to the most infamous and revolting treatment!"

And the woman's rage was so intense that it was anticipated that during the day Seymour would make her first break-out. However, breaking-out would have lost her "my friend," and Seymour subsided, made her complaint, and was promised all the redress that prison rules could afford her.

But prison rules had not been framed with any idea as to the injuries which the tails of the mice of the establishment might receive; and, this serious omission having been explained to her, Seymour was pacified. She bore ever afterwards an implacable hatred to the woman who had committed the offence on her "friend," and who made no scruple in avowing the

* This incident occurred in the old Millbank days, when ostensibly there was no superintendent to the prison.

fact; and her demonstrative contempt for that prisoner in particular was often a source of amusement to the women on occasions when they were brought together.

But "my friend" was doomed to a worse fate in the future. When it had recovered all its old confidence in its protector, attended Divine service again in the chapel, and become a regular guest at Seymour's dinner-table, a favourite cat called "Alma," attached to the establishment, made a pounce at it in Seymour's absence, and cut short its career.

Seymour showed great concern at the loss of her companion, broke into a passionate fit of weeping when the news was first communicated, and fell into a despondent and morbid condition, that indicated the weakness of her mind. It was some months before she recovered her customary equanimity; she really fretted about the mouse, and the unhappy termination of its career. In the evening, I have seen her with an unopened book of the prison library on her table, crying silently to herself over the loss of her loved one.

Seymour made many efforts to obtain a successor to "my friend." She broke up half her loaves to encourage the little animals to approach her; but although she succeeded so far as to induce one or two to venture on the table after the crumbs, if she remained at a respectful distance from them, yet there was no second mouse to venture within arm's length of one who wished well to the whole *mus* genus.

Seymour passed on to Brixton Prison, and the world of mice knew her no more.

Two instances of sparrow-taming occurred in my prison experience; one by a prisoner of a very different stamp from Seymour, who, by patience, perseverance, and constant study, lured a sparrow into her cell. The bird was christened "Bobby," and would come at her call and feed from her hand in much the same way as the ill-starred *protégé* of Seymour.

Bobby even evinced no objection to a paper bonnet, and was taught to hop over the table, harnessed by thread to a little paper cart of the prisoner's construction. In bright weather he would be absent for two or three days together; but when the weather was wet, Bobby would fly

into the cell and perch on the gas pipe, whence he would survey, with his head on one side, the woman at her work. But prison-pets were doomed to a sad end, and Bobby's fate was worse than "my friend's."

Flying round the cell one night after the gas was lighted, he made a dash at the flame, singed his wings, and died shortly after on the table of the cell, the woman wringing her hands over him.

Such little incidents as these show traits of kindness and feeling amongst the prison women; few and far between perhaps, but still evidence of a love and concern for something, in the midst of much hardness and obduracy of spirit. Had such feelings been encouraged in the past, perhaps the life of these poor caged spirits might not have ended quite so sadly!

In the midst of much that is evil, the good will put forth a feeble shoot or two; and if in strange directions, still they remain as evidence of the fairer side of these murky prison lives. If more time could be spared for each individual case—the nature and habits of the prisoner as carefully studied as a physician might study, in a dangerous

case, the antecedents of his suffering patient—I am sure more good would follow the attempt than those versed in the philosophy of crime have ever yet imagined.

CHAPTER XIV.

PRISONERS' FRIENDS.

GOVERNMENT does not wholly exclude the prisoners from the outer world—or rather from those faces appertaining to it. After six months at Millbank Prison, the women are allowed to see their friends once in three months — the fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers more happily off than they, and basking in the free air and sunshine beyond "such places." Once in three months, at Brixton Prison, a like privilege is conceded.

Caution is exercised on these visiting days, so that no collusion between the outer and the inner world of criminals may take place; so that no "old pals" and companions in crime may meet and make arrangements for the future —the bright future when the ticket will be granted, and the woman again turned out on society.

A strange medley of character do these prisoners' friends present; and strange attempts to defeat the sagacity of the watchful matron, and to work upon her woman's feelings, so that she may be induced to concede some little favour, are constantly being made. Tragedy, melodrama, comedy, farce, and burlesque play each a part in turn behind the screen of the visiting room; and the matron in attendance requires no small powers of self-command.

At Millbank, the prisoner's friend stands behind one wire-work screen, and the prisoner behind another, whilst in a space between the two sits the matron on duty silent and vigilant.

Let the reader suppose himself in this

space, or neutral ground, whilst a few prison visitors file before him in succession. They are fair portraitures of the figures that flit to and fro, and play their part here; such dialogues between prisoners and prisoners' friends happen almost every day.

They do not come in quite such rapid succession, perhaps, but our space is limited, and we have much to say on other topics ere FINIS be written to these chronicles.

The prisoner is a woman who has gone wrong in defiance of friends and husband; whom no efforts have ever set right. She is the wife of a poor industrious workman, who did his best to keep her straight, but could not hinder, in his absence, her constant visits to the gin-shop round the corner. Returning home each night with a hope that Jane would be better — just for once! — his hopes would be dashed by the deserted room, the fireless grate, and no dinner ready; or shadowed by the sleepy-looking, red-eyed woman reeling about the room, and gravely talking incoherent nonsense,

in the vain hope of impressing him with a belief in her sobriety. For there are poor men's homes and wives like unto this—and our sketch is no fancy picture to give effect to that which is to follow. Ignorance is one awful reason for sin—and Drink is another.

"If it hadn't been for the drink, sir,—oh! if it hadn't been for the drink!" moans many a prisoner when her heart is touched by the chaplain's earnest exhortation.

This prisoner, whom drink has brought to ruin, stands and looks wistfully across at a pale-faced man, in his Sunday's best, holding by the hand a little fair-haired child of six or seven years of age. The man is grave and sad, and passes his hand across his eyes, perhaps, as the child cries "mother." And the child's voice—as in these cases always—makes the woman lean her head against the wire-screen, and weep—oh! so bitterly! If by some grand process the impulse in these women's hearts at such times could but be stamped

indelibly there, we should hear much more of true repentance!

"Well, Jane?"

"Well, James?"

"Are you pretty well and comfortable, Jane—considerin'?"

"Yes, considerin'," answers the woman, with a weary sigh.

If this is the first meeting since her confinement, and she is such a woman as I attempt to describe here, she is abashed and taciturn at the beginning of the interview. Reminiscences of their last bitter parting flash across her memory; of the quarrel they had, perhaps, ere she ran away and left him, and came to grievous harm. The husband is embarrassed, too. He is new to prisons, and the prison matron sitting in the division between him and his wife perplexes him. He could speak out more fully all that is in his heart, if the silent witness to all was not sitting there, like a grim Fate by which his wife was haunted. It is hard to be sentimental, to talk of his forgiveness, to preach to her — who

had always hated preaching—in a third person's presence.

There ensues an awkward silence, broken at last by the husband. A happy thought occurs to him, to relieve the difficulties of the position. He starts a subject on which they can both discourse freely.

"Don't you think our little Jane has grown?"

"God bless her!—yes. You haven't forgotten me, Jane?" she calls across.

"No, mother."

"I suppose she can get round to kiss her mother, mum?" inquires the husband, and the woman, giving a little suppressed scream, clasps her hands, and cries,

"Oh! if I only might kiss her!"

The matron murmurs something concerning a breach of rules, and the impossibility of granting her request.

"What's become of Johnny?" asks the mother.

"He's apprenticed now, Jane. He couldn't leave this time. Perhaps the next I may manage to bring him."

"It's an awful place to see his mother in!"

"Ah, it is! And I hope it's a warning, Jane," remarks the husband. "Please God, this is a warning and a lesson that's to last."

"It'll never happen again," says the woman, confidently.

("It will never happen again," is the one unceasing refrain of prison penitents, real and sham).

"Well, I hope not."

The woman looks at him again more wistfully than ever.

"When I get my ticket, James, am I to come home?"

She has made home a curse to this man; she has been a thief, a drunkard—perhaps false to him; but these working men are always hopeful, large-hearted, and forgiving.

"I hold that man the worst of public foes
Who, either for his own or children's sake,
To save his blood from scandal, lets the wife,
Whom he knows false, abide and rule the house,"

says Tennyson; but it is a harsh assertion, and, in some cases, this "worst of public foes" may be the best of Christians and the most forgiving of men. Working men, however, do not read Tennyson to any extent, and were probably not thought of when the Laureate wrote those lines. There is a difference, too; the scandal is known, and the neighbours have already talked of James's wife, and pitied his up-hill work to make a good woman of her. The home is desolate, and always out of sorts; the children want looking after in his absence; if she would only repent in the future, what a different life for him and her—if she would only "stash" the drink!

And the man answers her question very hoarsely, but very firmly—

"Yes, Jane, if you'll try to make it home."

"I will, by God!" exclaims the woman, and meeting the matron's reproving glance, she repeats—"I will, James—indeed I will!" without the supplementary oath.

Then follows all the news of the neigh-

bourhood, to which the woman greedily listens: who has got on in business, and who has gone to the bad; how many have married and died, or had babies, since she was keeping her husband's house in order; how many are anxious about her, and who sends her her love in the days of her tribulation?

Suddenly the weakness common to the best of women peers forth.

"Who's keeping house for you now, James?"

"Robert's sister keeps the key, and looks in once or twice if I or the children are away. She gets my dinner for me, and so on."

"I never liked Robert's sister much, James."

"She's a very good woman—honest and industrious."

"Ah! you allus thought so much of *her!*"

The man seeks to turn the conversation; but the wife will know more of Robert's sister—how often she is at home, who sits up for him on "club nights," what becomes of Robert's sister on Sundays? The man answers frankly enough, and the woman appears satisfied; but there is a gloomy doubt amidst it

all, which will not be talked away. Robert's sister stands between her and the far-off vista through which brighter gleams break in upon the darkness of her prison life.

But the twenty minutes are up; the matron calls attention to the allotted time; the mother begins to cry again, and to wish that she could only kiss the child before she goes. The matron, if impulsive and tender-hearted, will take a ribbon or something from the child, and pass it to the mother, who will remember the kind action in her prayers that night, if she is one of the few who have been induced to pray to God, and to confide in His providential care! Wife, husband, and child then go their separate ways, and the memorable visit is registered in both their hearts.

Visits quite so sentimental between husband and wife are not, however, the general rule. Occasionally a series of mutual recriminations occur in this fashion:

Husband. Well, you've made a mess of it this time, Sue, by George!

Wife. So it seems.

Husband. All your own fault, you know.

Wife. Don't stand there, telling lies, Joe. If it hadn't been for your blackguard goings on, I should have never come to this.

Husband. You did it all yourself—you know you did. What do you want to try to make this lady (*with a jerk of his thumb to the matron on duty*) believe all your cussed stories for?"

And thus they will continue their accusations of each other, until, their voices rising as their passions become excited, the matron considers it her duty to remind them that, unless there is a change of tone, the interview must be summarily cut short.

But we have not done with prisoners' friends yet. A turn of the slide, and a penal class woman takes her place on one side, and her brother or sister, or both, on the other. In this case, for the sake of an illustration, we will say brother and sister together.

There is no mistaking the relationship, any more than the profession, past and present, of this trio. The overhanging brows, deep-set eyes, and thick sensual lips are of one family cast, and

the furtive glances right and left, and around, are true thieves' glances. There is a general likeness amongst professional thieves, which a little observation does not fail to detect. Knavery stamps all its votaries with a common seal, and though the impression is faint in many instances—in many more it is very strongly marked—yet the brand is always there, and there are no good thoughts to wear it away.

Greetings are exchanged. The prisoner hopes Jack and Mary are well, and Mary hopes the same of her unfortunate sister Ann. Glances are cast at the matron, and some movement of the features expresses their conviction that she is an easy one, or the reverse. The cue is taken accordingly, and the officer is prepared to be more than usually watchful and attentive.

Great regret is expressed at the prisoner's position, and many moral reflections are indulged in by the brother and sister, all for the edification of the matron in charge.

"I hope you'll never come to this again, Ann," says the brother; "you were brought up right and piously, and should have knowed

better—you were larnt your catechiz, and all the 'mandments, and we did our best to keep you straight."

"I know that, Jack."

"It's along o' bad company, Ann," adds Mary, with a wink; "all along of Jo' Barclay and his games. Jo's got in trouble, Ann."

"Oh, has he?"

"Seven years on it, poor fellow! Tooked up all in a flash like."

"Poor Jo!"

"How are *you* getting on, Ann?" asks Jack.

"Oh, pretty well," with a reckless toss of her head.

"That's all right."

"Where's mother?" inquires the prisoner.

"She's—she's *gone in the country*."

"And father?"

"We expect him back *from the country* next month—on the fifth, Ann."

"Ah, I was a-trying to count up," remarks Ann; "I thought it was about the fifth."

Jack proceeds to communicate all the news, in a style a little enigmatical, dropping now and then three or four words of true thieves' dialect, or Romany, as it is sometimes designated by the women, although there is a marked difference between thieves' Romany and the dialect peculiar to the gipsy race. When indications of a dialogue in this *patois* begin to appear, the matron warns the prisoner's friends that it is a breach of rules, and will be followed by the prisoner's withdrawal. The friends "are very sorry, mum, and very humble, and it didn't strike 'em before, mum, and it was on'y a habit of theirs, and it shan't occur again, mum."

In less than two or three minutes it does occur again, and there is such an evident intention to deceive, that it becomes necessary to abridge the interview, and separate these black sheep. Jack and Mary go away muttering discontent, and Ann takes to smashing when she reaches her cell, because she has been put upon and treated shabbily.

"It's all that Miss ——. I'll have her

blessed"—she doesn't always call it blessed—"life one of these fine days. On'y wait till I get a chance, that's all!"

A turn of the slide, and the picture of another party is presented. I will give their interview almost verbatim, as it affords some little insight into the thoughts of a certain class of prisoners from which I have to draw a character presently.

The prisoner is a young, pale-faced girl; the prison visitor, her mother, a poor, old, tottering, decently clad woman. The latter cries very bitterly at the first sight of her daughter, and makes frequent use of a very clean pocket-handkerchief. The prisoner bites her lips, which will quiver in spite of her, and bursts out at last with—

"Dontee cry, mother!—I be very comfortable—there's such a little to cry about!"

"Oh! dear—it's very sad!"

"Did you come up to-day?"

"Yes, by the early train. I suppose I can't shake hands with my girl, anyhow, miss?"

"It is against the rules here."

"Very well, miss," she says, with a sigh.

It is the daughter in this instance that asks all the questions, and tries to distract her mother from the dark thoughts that such an interview is calculated to suggest.

"How are you getting on, mother?—How's Uncle John, and all his little ones?—Has Jemmy come back from sea?—Have you heard from Jemmy?—Is Sarah Ann married yet?"

The old lady gathers more nerve as the interview proceeds, dries her eyes, answers all her daughter's questions, and becoming at last very garrulous, details all the gossip of the far-away village whence she has journeyed to see her imprisoned child.

"Uncle John helped me with a couple of shillings, my dear, or I should never have been able to come and see you," she tells her daughter; "Uncle John's always very kind, though he has a large family of his own to help, Martha."

"How did you get through the winter, now?" asks the daughter anxiously.

"Poorly! poorly! My eyes went bad again—and there was no work about—and so I had parish relief, my dear."

"Ah! that's bad!"

"I shall have to go into 'the House' altogether soon."

"No, don't do that!" is the quick reply.

"There's no help for it, Martha. It isn't," she adds, in a sorrowful, almost a reproachful manner, "as if I had my daughter to help me in my weakness and old age."

"Don't go into the House," repeats the prisoner.

"What can I do, my dear?"

"*Come here!*"

The old woman flings up her hands in horror, and the daughter continues in an earnest whisper—

"You'll be treated well here. You'll have enough to eat and drink — you won't have any hard words here — they give you such blankets and sheets to lie on!—you can have the doctor every day if you like—

and it's like heaven to be in the Infirmary! Oh! mother, if you would only try and come here!"

The mother stands behind the wire-work and seems to consider the matter; the daughter becomes more eloquent and persuasive—even begins to suggest the best plan to set about it—until the matron calls her to order, and reproves her for her wickedness.

"It's not wickedness!" says the prisoner; "it's the best thing, God knows, that can happen to us poor!"

And the prisoner is not far wrong. Amidst the mass of our fallen sisters that Millbank and Brixton Prisons contain, there are these strange practical philosophers—women who have weighed all the chances between the workhouse and the prison, and who, being compelled to choose between one and the other, strike the balance in favour of the gaol. A little less liberty, but more kindness and attention; better food and more friendly faces—only the key turned on them and their sleeping-chamber

called "a cell!" Step by step from Millbank to Brixton—perhaps from Brixton to Fulham, if they are young enough—books to read, good warm clothing, and the chaplain to talk to them every day.

I have been often tempted to wonder whether the workhouses would be always full, whether women would still have to hesitate between the Parish and the Prison, and whether the time would come when Government would make no more of these disgraceful contracts with the slop-houses and the wholesale firms, no longer compete so closely, so cruelly, with the honest and hard-working poor. If some better and more just system be not presently adopted, there will be living illustrations to Hood's "Song of the Shirt" to the end of time. I cannot think it fair or humane to accept contracts from such firms as those of Moses and Son, and others, at prices with which no woman who has rent to pay and a home to keep can possibly compete. Prisoners, especially female prisoners, should do prison work, army work, the binding of the prison books—even the printing of the innumerable forms might possibly be taught

them; but any other work than that of Government should not, for the sake of those who desire to live honestly and resist temptation, be allowed to find its way into our male or female prisons.

I am conscious that I am not the first to raise my voice against this system; but the matter has been long since dropped, and the system is at work still. It is a system morally and radically wrong, and must fall some day; and even though the change should entail some additional expense upon the nation, I am confident that the heart of the people of this country is large and sound enough not to shrink from that ordeal, for the sake of the hard-working poor, struggling, in the midst of difficulty and temptation, to maintain their honesty and uprightness. In one year, *for one firm alone*, by one female prison, forty-three thousand seven hundred and twenty-eight shirts were made, and the work, thus diverted from its proper channel, is still done on as large a scale.*

* 50,822 shirts were made for one City firm, and 96,541 bags mended for another, by Millbank women, in 1860. By the Brixton female convicts, during the same year, 30,423 shirts, 1,809 duck slops, and upwards of a thousand other articles, were made for different firms. *See Chap.* 19, *On Prison Statistics, Vol. II.*

Now, there are many women like the prisoner, whose interview with her mother I have described—and like one I shall have to mention in a future chapter—who, knowing and deliberately weighing all this, give up their labour in despair, fearing that they can never contend with success against such opposition.

The woman I have mentioned left her daughter with a very different idea of prison life from that which she entertained when she first met her; with a conviction that it was to be preferred to life in the workhouse, and with regret that one must forfeit a good name to become a female convict. If the doors of the prison could have been opened for admission only by the expression of a wish to that effect, we should ere long have had the mother as well as the daughter.

One half of the prison visitors are, however, as bad as the prisoners—pupils of the same school, greater adepts in crime, who for the present have escaped confinement. The cool impudence of this class is worthy of note. Many of them are deep knaves; but there is often a simplicity in their cunning that defeats itself. A prison

visitor of this doubtful class will calmly pass through the grating a piece of paper to the matron, saying:

"Will you have the kindness to hand that to my sister"—(or mother, or whatever the relationship may be)—"it's only an address, miss."

The bland astonishment feigned by the visitor on being informed that it is against the rules to pass a paper to the prisoner is a poor attempt at the assumption of the appearance of innocence of any evil purpose.

Delicate hints are occasionally made to the matron that money, in return for the concession of any little favour, will be forthcoming if required. The more disreputable class of these visitors appear to consider this offer as a temptation which even a prison matron has not the power to withstand. In some rare cases the offer is made in ignorance of the rules, and in all good feeling—a fact which is easily discovered. On a prisoner saying once to a sailor who had been admitted as a visitor,

"I've nothing to complain of—the prison matron is very kind to me," he immediately drew forth two sovereigns, which he insisted on

the matron's accepting on the instant, until the fact was made perfectly clear to him, that it was more than her place was worth to receive the donation.

One young woman who had brought her captive mother a screw of snuff in a paper, could not understand the matron's reason for not passing it over. And the mother, who had a *penchant* for the luxury, fearing that it was not to be given up to her, hoped Miss —— would just "stretch a point" for this once. "It was only snuff, and it could not do a mite of harm to anybody—and she did so miss it—and, strike her dead, Miss ——, if she'd ever split about it!"

The opportunity for "splitting," it may readily be imagined, was not put in her power.

Prison visiting has also sad and trying phases. When the prisoner is one of the higher classes, and the commission of her crime has been one of those mysteries for which it is difficult to account, the pain of meeting her friends is almost unendurable. The latter, whose carriage may be waiting in Millbank Street, regard the prisoner with wonder, pity, and feelings of shame

they can with difficulty conceal; and the tears and sobs which they cannot restrain affect the watcher more than is generally imagined. It is very difficult to become accustomed to this portion of a principal matron's duty—I have never envied any one the office.

CHAPTER XV.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—"GRANNY COLLIS."

As an illustration of much that has been alluded to in a preceding chapter, I may as well devote a page or two in this place to the outlines of a character which, though it may be regarded as exceptional, is still sometimes to be found in our female prisons.

Collis was an old woman of seventy years of age and upwards—almost the mother of

the prison Looking philosophically at the advantages of prison life, she grew as attached to her place of confinement as old debtors are said to have been to the Queen's Bench and the Fleet.

She was not a great favourite with the other prisoners, for she was too quiet, orderly, and in her way religious. Still, she was one who made no enemies, got into no quarrels or disputes, and was content to be let alone. More of a favourite with the prison officers, she was meek, civil, and obedient to the assistant matron on probation as well as to the lady-superintendent.

A little, spare, pretty, old woman, with a chirping voice, good-tempered, even merry at times, she took the ills that prison flesh is heir to with composure, was content with everything, and could always be trusted as truthful. She read her Bible with great attention in her cell, and made no parade of doing so. The only thing about her that looked like affectation was her expression of regret at the theft that had brought her to such a pass—for she was fond of prison

life, and had outlived all friends in the world beyond it.

"I don't know what I shall do when my time's up," she said to me once; "there's no one to take care of me outside, and I'm afraid they'll treat me very badly at the workhouse. Well, I suppose, miss, I must make the best of it."

She was a woman who always did make the best of it, and her good-tempered, pleasant face was scarcely like that of a prisoner. At her age, and with her natural weakness, it would have been easy, with a little acting, to have been passed over to the Infirmary ward, where "everything that heart could wish for," as the phrase runs, would have been at her disposal. But she was satisfied with her cell, and her footing of equality with the other prisoners—both at Millbank and Brixton—and in fact was very proud of being able to do her stroke of work—such as it was—with the rest. Matrons fell into the way of treating her kindly, and always gave her, when it was possible, the lion's share of

ease. There is respect for old age, even in a prison.

All the prisoners were "children" with her —"Oh, that unruly child next door, how she did keep me awake last night, to be sure!"—or, "That poor child, Smith, has gone off to the 'dark' again—dear, dear, dear now, I'm really very sorry!"

Her cell was a pattern of cleanliness and order—"her little room," she was fond of designating it. A curious sight in the long winter evenings it was, to see this motherly old woman sitting with her open Bible—her thin, bony hands pushing back her grey hair, as she leaned her elbows on the table, and studied the promises of that Book on which she built her hopes.

I have often wondered what peculiar train of thought Granny Collis was accustomed to indulge in over her Bible—how she reconciled her past life, and even her future intentions, with the counsel and warning of God's Word. I believe she had some peculiar train of reasoning by which she reconciled matters, and that

she fancied, even if she returned to prison to work out a fresh sentence, that God would forgive the new crime which might place her there, considering how helpless and friendless she was in the outer world. And is there any one of us bold enough to say what sins our Father will not forgive his erring children?

Collis was attentive to the minister's discourse in chapel, a regular communicant, and a patient listener to the good man's counsel in her cell; but really penitent as she was for past misconduct, she clung to the idea of coming back again, although it was the matrons rather than the higher officers of the prison who guessed her real intentions.

"I'll try the workhouse," was her remark one day; "But I'm thinking it won't suit me like this. Not half so comfortable and *quiet*."

Collis worked her sentence out, and went her way. The prisoners wished Granny good luck, the matrons bade her God speed, and the prison gates closed behind her, as it was thought, for the last time. She had worked

out her full sentence — she had been committed before the act of 1857, that allowed remissions from long sentences of penal servitude *—and it was not anticipated by the majority that that cheerful, feeble old woman would ever be tottering down the wards again.

But in a few months Collis reappeared at Millbank Prison. Old Mary had been again convicted of a petty theft, and was sentenced to a second term of imprisonment.

"I have come back, to settle down for good," she said; "I know I've done very wrong, and that I am old enough to know what's right by this time, but *I couldn't keep away!* I have tried the workhouse, and they're so terrible noisy there, and there's not half the order there should be, and everybody wants to quarrel so. Besides," she added with characteristic naïveté, "they don't understand my ways at the workhouse,

* Before 1857 tickets of leave were granted to transports, but sentences of penal servitude were worked out in full. See Chap. VI.

and you are all so used to me by this time!"

Passing from Millbank to Brixton, she made the same excuse to the authorities there, and the same confession, that "she knew how wrong it was," and then "settled down" to work her time out, or to die in working it. She fell into the same old habits—read her Bible as industriously as ever, took the Sacrament, preserved ever the same good temper, and *did* die before the term of her imprisonment was ended.

She broke up slowly, and was removed at last to the Infirmary, where she was always patient, cheerful, and resigned. A good prisoner, and as good a Christian as it was possible for a prisoner to be, she died, I think at the age of seventy-six, in the Infirmary ward of Brixton Prison.

She had wished to die in gaol, and had sinned to die there. A strange, hard, friendless life hers must have been, to have looked forward to such a haven of rest as the close of her pilgrimage!

CHAPTER XVI.

PRISON-CHILDREN.

THE subject which forms the heading of this chapter has been lightly dwelt upon by former writers on prison matters. As I have a little more to say concerning it, I may venture to follow on the beaten track. In most cases, for the reader's sake, I have touched but lightly on incidents to which other writers have alluded; only where it was

necessary to correct some error, or to supply some forgotten details, have I considered it my duty to follow in the steps of those who have preceded me.

Setting aside for the nonce the fact that an article on the Prison Nursery has been written by Mr. Mayhew, I turn my attention to this subject—this little change of prison scene and character, which passes before the view of those in office at Brixton.

The prison nursery, it may be premised, is peculiar to Brixton.* Women who have not served their probation at Millbank are sent on to the Surrey prison when their time of childbirth draws near. The per-centage of the number of women who arrive *enceinte* at Millbank is not a large one; still at Brixton timely provision is

* Previous to the institution of the Nursery at Brixton Prison, there was a series of cells alloted to prisoners and their children at Millbank, and termed the "Nursery Ward." This has been long since abolished. Very shortly I have reason to believe the prison nursery will follow the "Nursery Ward." Since the writing of this work, great care is exercised in excluding from Millbank, and consequently from Brixton, all prisoners likely to give birth to children at a future time.

made for such emergencies, and a nursery for the little unfortunates provided.

Strictly speaking, what is called the nursery is more of a convalescent room, though it generally passes by the former appellation.

The subject of my last sketch spent some time here in her old age, previous to being passed on to the Infirmary; and women whose mental or physical infirmities render them unfit subjects for stone cells, but who are not ill enough to become inmates of the Infirmary, are accommodated at this resting-place.

The prison nursery is in the centre of a prison ward, and is a large room with sleeping accommodation for twenty women and their charges. Iron screens are padlocked before the fires, to prevent any accident from the carelessness of the women or the rashness of the children. The mothers are supposed to rise at the same time as the women in other parts of the prison; but some latitude is allowed in this respect, and it is not

till a considerably later hour that each prisoner has cleaned her allotted portion of the room, and the children have begun to play about.

That prison nursery forms a strange picture. "There is no place," Mr. Mayhew writes, "in which there is so much toleration and true wisdom, if not goodness, to be learnt as in the convict nursery at Brixton." I may add that there is no place that suggests more sad thoughts, or that affords at times a more awful insight into the workings of some mothers' hearts. In the aggregate these female prisoners are gentle, loving mothers enough; but they are mothers who, having known no better life themselves, and being insensible to the shame of their position, care not to develop in these little prison flowers the grace and virtue that are the foundation of happiness.

And it is a sad thought, what will become of these children when the mother and child pass into the world again—when the mother returns to her old life, and flings her child upon society, to grow up as hard,

callous, and crafty as herself. What awful lessons some of them will learn! and what a lot of crime and punishment may await many of them!

There have been a few variations in the prison rules respecting these children. They were formerly sent to their friends, or to the parish, at the expiration of two years; of late they have generally remained till the completion of their mothers' sentence. In the case of long sentenced women I am doubtful, but I remember no instance of a child remaining longer than four years in prison. One child, named Annie, who was not born at the prison, but, for some particular reason, arrived there afterwards, remained, however, with her mother till she reached the age of six years. On glancing at the article on the Prison Nursery, in Mr. Mayhew's work, "The Great World of London," I perceive he mentions a child of four years old, who was so surprised at the aspect of external things, that in the first days of its freedom—or rather of its mother's freedom

—it called a horse "a great cat." Mr. Mayhew, I am inclined to think, has been misled by the statement of a matron. The prison children have many opportunities of seeing horses in the prison yard.

The airing ground, wherein they were accustomed to play until a late period, has a pair of gates opening on the court, or outer yard, at which a row of children were sure to appear, if they were left open for prison purposes a moment. Into the outer yard horses and carts are constantly entering; the contractor's or the miller's cart, the Director's cab, the omnibuses with women from Millbank to Brixton, and those to take back the misbehaved to Millbank,* &c. The children are not kept quite so much in the dark with reference to all sublunary things, and they are fond of playing at horses in the prison nursery, with more noise and pattering of their tiny feet than is altogether comfortable at times. They

* The prison rule is, however, to keep the gates strictly closed during the arrival or departure of prisoners.

even pass out of prison occasionally, and go, by invitation to tea, to the houses of some of the principal officers down the prison lane, and now and then to Sunday-school in the Chaplain's quarters, I believe.

The children are generally happy little things. Their playthings principally consist of a few rag dolls made by the mothers, and some boxes of toys purchased by the matrons, who have their little favourites. They are, taken altogether, a delicate class of children — the prison air is not the best atmosphere for infants — yet many of them are quick, sharp in intellect, with a sagacity that seems to me beyond their years. Not a few of them are the offspring of sharp mothers, whose example and teaching are pernicious. It is one of the saddest facts I have to record, that more than once I have heard a child of two years old giving utterance to an oath that it has learned from—perhaps been taught by—its mother, and the exclamation has been received by a shout of laughter from the women in the room.

One little child, when teased too much by its mother, or by other mothers, was in the habit of threatening to go to the "dark."

I remember but one case of a mother with little love for her offspring—who was more jealous of her "pal," and her pal's attention to other prisoners, than of the diversion of her own child's affection from its natural object. Women might take the infant, and matrons might make a favourite of it; but talk too much to her old pal, and, forgetting the nursery and the child, she would take to smashing, and be carried off to a refractory cell in consequence.

Another mother—in the days of the nursery ward at Millbank—evinced her gratitude for a matron's attention to her child, by tearing a handful of hair from the officer's head. The latter was stooping to kiss the child in the cell, and the temptation to a malicious woman being too great to be resisted, the savage attack was made. Most of the children who have attained the age of three years have some knowledge of

their letters, but there is no regular plan of instruction, no schoolmistress appointed to the nursery.

It is a dull, unnatural life for these little ones; but with many of them, I fear, it is the brightest and purest era in their lives.

CHAPTER XVII.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—MARY ANN BALL.

THE reader has already obtained some insight into the character of this prisoner from anecdotes previously related. In my chapter on prisoners' vanity, I have made special mention of Ball, whose ingenuity in altering her dress and bonnet, etc., was a subject of envy or admiration amongst the prisoners, according to their respective natures.

Mary Ann Ball was a transfer from Stafford Gaol, from which she arrived with a few special

cautions from its authorities. Particular mention was made of her cunning and her extraordinary strength. It was mentioned, by way of a delicate hint to be cautious, that at Stafford she had torn up with her hands an iron plate firmly secured in the floor.

Ball was a very handsome girl, nineteen or twenty years of age, dark-eyed, and of the middle height. Perfectly conscious of her good looks, she was about the vainest woman who ever entered a prison. Everything was at once altered to suit her figure or agree with her complexion; and the attempt to train her to act in obedience to the prison rules was an arduous and unprofitable task. She was not to be tamed; she might be killed by harsh discipline, but there was no rendering her a well-behaved woman. Her own way she must and would have.

She was not one of those morose, malicious women to whom I shall have to refer a little further on. In her best moods, she was light-hearted and generous. There was one drawback, however—that her best moods were few

and far between, and that a straw would ruffle them. The appropriation by another of her piece of flannel, of her particular seat in chapel, or of her place in the laundry; a contemptuous remark from another prisoner, a sharp word from one of the matrons, even a difference of opinion about the complaints with which she used to trouble the doctor, would transform her at once into a raging fury.

Ball was often in trouble for breaking windows and destroying the furniture of her cell; and her progress to the "dark" could be traced by shreds and patches of her garments, by tufts of hair from the men's heads and whiskers, and by the buttons of their official uniform. In the dark cell she would keep herself lively for some time by the exercise of her vocal powers; and the handcuffs with which her wrists had been ornamented were generally flung at the head of the first person who opened the outer door and looked through the grating at her.

There was a very good rule in my time—I believe it has not been altered—to the effect

that the matron on night duty should visit the "dark cells" on each of her rounds, and make certain that the woman in it was well, or had not attempted violence on herself. The inmates of the "dark" are desperate characters, and there is no reckoning upon their actions from one hour to another. The matron passes once every hour; if the woman is singing, she goes by, or perhaps attempts a gentle remonstrance; if she is quiet, and will not respond to her name, it is necessary to slide back the pad, open the first door, and look through the iron grating which forms the second.

Ball was very partial to giving this extra trouble to the night-officer. Though she had been singing ten minutes previously, she would maintain a rigid silence when the matron noiselessly approached,* and tapped with her knuckles at the first door.

"Good night, Ball," or, "Are you quite

* The night-officer is generally accustomed to wear a species of India-rubber shoes or goloshes. These are termed "sneaks" by the women.

well, Ball ?" was the general remark on such occasions.

No reply.

Very probably the matron would attempt to coax her.

"You are not going to make me unfasten the door again, Ball—do answer, there's a good girl ?"

No response issuing from the dark cell, the door would be opened, and the light in the matron's hand held aloft for better inspection. Then Ball would perhaps be found standing against the iron door, looking very haggard, and would probably receive the officer with a half-maniacal laugh ; or lying full length on the floor, with the remnants of her blankets strewn round her, she would refuse to answer any question put to her.

The following dialogue once occurred between Ball and a matron on night duty. The latter had opened the outer door two or three times, and Ball had regularly been found close to the iron grating. The fourth time the matron, who was somewhat of a favourite with this troublesome

prisoner in her best moods, complained of fatigue. Still Ball stood and stared behind the bars, and made no reply.

"You will not give me all this trouble again, Ball?"

"Sure," was the sharp, sudden answer to this question.

"It isn't my fault you are here. I am really sorry to find you have broken out again."

"You sorry!—that's the way you all try to cant over me."

"I really am sorry, Ball."

Ball gave an impatient snort.

"And I am tired. I have been nursing a little sick brother to-day, and have not had my usual rest. Try to sleep, and say good night when I knock next time, will you?"

"Shan't!"

The next round the matron knocked as usual on the outer door.

"Good night, Ball," she cried.

"Good night, miss. *God bless you!*"

Such little signs of an impressionable nature this handsome tigress made at rare intervals, but it

would have required the whole staff of matrons to study every whim of hers; and so she would break out again, go to the "dark," come back, quarrel, and so on, *ad infinitum.*

Ball was not only skilful in removing her handcuffs, but it was with considerable difficulty that any of the canvas strait waistcoats, or "jackets," as they are called, could be kept on her for any length of time. She had an ingenious method of rubbing her jacket against the wall of the cell until the straps were worn through; and having thus freed her hands from durance vile, she would make amends for past inaction by wreaking her vengeance on all the objects around her that lay in her power.

At Brixton Prison she gave no sign of amendment; every article of prison costume she altered to her own fancy, and a remonstrance on the subject elicited the customary outburst. She wound up one of her sojourns at that prison by a feat that would have added to the notoriety of Jack Sheppard. Being confined for misbehaviour in one of the refractory cells, she contrived to free herself from her jacket, tear down the bricks and mortar

of the wall, and work her way into the chimney of a matron's room adjoining—in which she remained a fixture, until relieved from her extraordinary position. For this feat she was returned to Millbank, where she continued to behave much after her usual manner, conducting herself with just sufficient moderation of language and behaviour to make her passable for Brixton once more. The superintendents, matrons, etc., of both prisons were always extremely rejoiced to get rid of her. If Millbank could only flatter itself into the belief that Ball's conduct was improving, away went the girl to the Surrey prison; if Brixton could make a fair case against her for breach of discipline, back she came to Middlesex.

"Here's Ball back," spread with lightning-like rapidity from mess-room to mess-room; and the news was welcome neither to prison officers nor prisoners. Only one woman—a prisoner of a later date, concerning whom we shall have a little to say presently—was ever equally incorrigible.

Ball was partial to company, and would at times feign insanity, and make sham attempts to injure

herself, in order to have an associate. She was well acquainted with the rule that no prisoner giving signs of a failing intellect is allowed to be alone in her cell; and, when tired of her own society, she would indulge in fits of ungovernable violence and incoherent raving, that puzzled every one that endeavoured to account for them.

I have seen three male officers and two matrons trying to secure her in bed, and such was the immense power of this woman that even when fighting against such odds it was with difficulty she was at last mastered.

The only attempt at escape—or perhaps merely to elude the vigilance of the officer in charge and create an excitement—was made by Ball and another prisoner. The washing for the prisons is chiefly performed, at Brixton, in a large laundry erected for the purpose. A certain number of the prisoners are told off each day for washing duties, and marched from the cells to the laundry. Here the washing is proceeded with under the surveillance of a matron, whose berth is not the most eligible "under Government." The muscular strength of Ball, which in other circumstances was

so formidable, was applied to a useful purpose when she took her place at the washing-tub.

In the winter time, over their washing-tubs, Ball and another prisoner, of the name of Gardner, concerted a plan for eluding the matron's vigilance. Night had almost set in before the women were conducted to their cells, to reach which it was necessary to cross one of the airing grounds. On their way Ball and Gardner suddenly dropped behind some bushes, crouching in their shadow until the last woman and matron in attendance had passed by. It may be readily imagined that the consternation amongst the prison officers was excessive, when it was discovered that two women had disappeared from the ranks. As the prisoners passed into the wards towards their cell they were counted in the usual way, and the startling fact became apparent that Ball and Gardner were missing.

An alarm of fire could only have produced equal excitement amongst all the Brixton staff; the matrons trembled for their situations; the credit of every one's vigilance was at stake. The alarm was given, and search was made for the missing

culprits; messengers were despatched to the outer walls, to make quite certain that the fugitives were not already dropping from them.

The officers having retraced their steps across the yard to the laundry, Ball and Gardner were found quietly ensconced in a dark corner of it. Considerable satisfaction was expressed by these young ladies at the trouble they had given, and the excitement into which they had thrown the whole prison. For this escapade both were confined in refractory cells, with bread and water.

Time, that waits for no woman, brought nearer every day the certainty of liberty for Ball, who did make some little effort to behave better as the period approached. She was also humoured in no small degree. Harsh measures had been a failure with her; her strength had been tested to the utmost, and she was no longer the powerful, healthy girl who had entered the prison years ago. Still her spirit was not broken; she was as quick to take offence and evince her usual tempers as ever; it was only by long study of her peculiar disposition that the matrons had learned how successfully to humour her caprice, which

was the best way to counteract any threatened storm.

When a ward was being exercised, she was allowed at times to water a little patch of garden ground in the airing yard, or to go out on cleaning duties. Any plan, indeed, which offered a chance of making her more agreeable or submissive, was readily adopted.

As the days between her prison cell and liberty grew fewer and fewer—could be counted on her fingers—she betrayed an unusual amount of restlessness and excitement.

"If I could only have one more break-out before I go," she frankly avowed once; "I can hardly stand this quietness. I am sure I shall make a smash of it before the ticket comes."

Ball, I should have remarked, had long since forfeited, by her misconduct, her claim to a ticket-of-leave; and it was only by the kindness of a director that she had been given an extra chance —an eight months' further trial. Had she been reported during those probationary months, she would have had to work out her full sentence. This was the secret of her hard struggle with

her own desperate character. Sometimes she felt the impulse to break out so overpowering that she would implore her matron to lock her up in the "dark" for a couple of hours or so.

"Lock me up!—it's a-coming, if you don't!—just an hour or two, to get me cool like!"

And she was quietly locked up for the period required, and came out all the better for the change; and so by her own efforts, and the matron's leniency, she fought her way through her time, and received at last her licence to retire.

It was a happy day for the officers when Ball took her departure, although it was not anticipated that more than a fortnight would elapse before her presence would again cast a shadow over Brixton Prison.* She had said something of an intention to proceed to America, to try her fortune in the new world; but as she was constantly changing her mind, little satisfaction was derived from her assertion.

However, to the amazement of the officers, and, I trust, for the lasting benefit of English society,

* Female prisoners taken up on ticket-of-leave, return at once to Brixton Prison to finish their sentence.

she took her departure to America, the prisons of which country, let us hope, have as yet had no knowledge of her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GOOD-CONDUCT WOMEN AND THEIR PRIVILEGES.

We have spoken so much of bad-conduct women and their vagaries—and there remains so much yet untold concerning them—that it may be as much a relief to the reader as to the writer to pause awhile, and glance at the better side of prison character.

I could have wished it had been in my power to select brighter scenes fully to exemplify the good that is inherent in the human heart, and to exhibit the fruit that genuine

repentance often bears. Possibly the book would have been more devoid of interest and incident; yet the writer's task would have been a more gratifying one, and philanthropists would have found more subjects for congratulation than it will be in my power to offer them.

But I have set myself this task, and have resolved to fulfil it in a plain and truthful manner. Round the doors of these dark places I cannot wreathe many garlands to hide the deformity within—it is beyond the prison that a great writer pictures vice behind its mask of flowers. Here vice exists in all its naked and abhorred deformity; exultant in the ruin it has caused and the life it has taken, grieving only for the barriers by which its freedom is restrained, and by which it is checked in its downward course.

I spoke just now of the better side of prison character. Perhaps, after all, it is only the side better disciplined, on which most of these good-conduct women range themselves.

Women who have command over their passions, and have the common sense to see

that a strict obedience to the prison rules tends to their own advantage, procures them little privileges, and increases the scale of their gratuities, form the majority of the good-conduct class. Many of them are hypocritical and canting in the extreme—make whining protestations of repentance to the chaplain, and when his back is turned upon them, indulge in a grimace at his remarks. A few, a very few, are quiet and orderly, make no profession, or, if they make one, seem really imbued with a sense of the error of their ways. Women of this character are seldom enrolled in the good books of their fellow-prisoners. It is difficult to draw the line where hypocrisy ends and true religious feeling begins. It is a riddle even to the man of God, who has been arduously labouring at the uphill task of these women's reformation, encouraged now and then by seeing the sparks of the purer fire that burns within fanned into a flame.

The advantages attached to good conduct are seen best at Brixton. The first acknowledgment of their better conduct is their trans-

ference from Millbank to Brixton. The rewards are progressive, and we will follow the steps of an industrious woman from the third class to the top of the tree, when the much-coveted print-dress of special service, an omen that her days of prison life are drawing to a close, is conferred.

A third-class woman wears a brown dress, and belongs to the "old prison;" she has the usual prison diet, and a gratuity of fourpence a week in return for her labour. After a few months' faithful service, during which no report has been made against her for incivility and insubordination, she passes to the East Wing, where she wears the same brown dress, with the addition of a badge of black cloth, having No. 2 stitched upon it in white, becomes so and so of the East Division, and is allowed the woman's luxury of tea three times in the week. The weekly salary for her services is raised to sixpence, and her account is as carefully kept at the office as the Marquis of Westminster's may be at his banker's.

Two months of this service take her to the

West Division, and make her a green-dress woman, one of the first class, with tea every day, a gratuity of eightpence a week, and a No. 1 badge. More "talking time" is also allowed to the Number 1 women; a favour that is highly appreciated, as some readers of my own sex may readily imagine. From the Number 1 women are chosen "the labour women," that is, those who can be serviceable in the laundry, kitchen, infirmary, &c., and those less robust, who are useful as good needlewomen. A labour-woman, and a needlewoman who can make five or six shirts a week, are allowed one shilling a week gratuity; and a woman who never loses her badge finds, when her time has expired, a nice little amount to start her in the world again, payable in three instalments, if the sum amounts to six pounds or upwards.

The first instalment is generally one pound nineteen shillings and sixpence—never more. A discharged prisoner resident in the country takes home with her the necessary forms of application for the remaining instalments, which forms, at the

expiration of the allotted time (two months, I think), must be filled in by the woman herself, and witnessed by a clergyman or magistrate, who has also to testify to her mode of living. Under these circumstances I think there must be, in Government hands, a surplus fund which is never likely to be drawn upon.

Concerning these accounts there is no end of squabbling between the women and the officers of the wards. The financial condition of each woman is made out on cards, and given in once a quarter; and the common rule is for a prisoner to consider her account extremely low and one-sided, and to suggest that the weeks in which five or six shirts have been made (shilling weeks) have been considerably under-estimated.

Prisoners climb to Number 1, and fall to Number 2 or 3 (seldom 3, unless any stealing or fighting occurs), and then work up again. A woman rarely retains a Number 1 badge for the whole period of her sentence, unless it be an old woman of reticent habits. A Number 1 woman, if under forty years of age, is eligible for Fulham Refuge within twelve or fourteen

months of the expiration of her prison servitude. Those past that age, or who have lost their badge several times for incivility, and whose future conduct still remains a matter of some speculation, remain at Brixton, and serve their time out.

Losing a badge involves no loss of gratuity—save the difference of remuneration between a second and first-class woman—unless a break-out occurs, or damage is done to prison property, when the expenses are carefully deducted from the little account in hand.

A woman who has behaved remarkably well all her time—who has not had a single break-out, or destroyed the property of the prison—is rewarded, towards the end of her imprisonment, with the "special service dress"; a cotton print gown and apron, that render her a distinguished mark amongst the browns and greens of less deserving prisoners.

The prisoners are naturally proud of this dress. Twelve is the maximum number of special service dresses allowed at Brixton. A special service woman has great advantages. She is eligible to

act as messenger, is sent unguarded from one wing to another, or to any part of the prison, ending with the great front gates, where sits sturdy, honest Mr. Luckett—the amiable Cerberus of this sombre institution.

Beyond this, Government has no further favours to confer at Brixton—save the ticket-of-leave, which ends one chapter of a "strange, eventful history."

CHAPTER XIX.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—A FIGHT FOR A SOUL.

In the story which follows, though every incident is strictly true, I shall not make any parade of names, but, to the best of my ability, and for reasons that will be presently obvious, disguise those of the principal actors in the events recorded. Not, as in another story which I have to tell, that there is anything which militates against the character

of any prisoner or prison officer—on the contrary, there is a great deal that redounds to the credit of every one connected with it—but that the individuals are still living and breathing in our midst, and any public mention of their names would tend to draw an amount of attention towards them to which they would probably very naturally object.

My story shows the brighter side of prison life; and in the midst of the darkness that belongs to such an existence, it is pleasant to find a flower springing up in uncongenial soil, and struggling hard, amidst the hostile winds that threaten to lay it low, to hold itself upright in the world.

The prisoner I will call Macklin—a young Scotch girl, who, in the days before Scotland kept its prisoners in its county gaols, was sent from Glasgow to Millbank Prison to work out a long sentence for shoplifting. She was a dark-haired, frank-faced girl. Her demeanour was cheerful, and her readiness to obey orders, and submit to her teachers and masters, speedily attracted some interest towards her. Time, and those spasmodic half-confidences which the prisoners

make to their female custodians—confidences that are always more shunned than courted—elicited the few facts of her early life.

She was one of a very disreputable family in Glasgow—mother, elder brothers and sisters, had offered her no good example. She had been early sent on the streets to beg or steal, and had probably received careful training in all that was vile. Begging and stealing had brought many sentences, increasing in length and severity, upon her, until an act of greater daring incurred a seven years' transportation—as it was called then—and brought her, in due course, to Millbank Prison.

She was afterwards one of the early arrivals at Brixton Prison—then recently converted into a female convict establishment—where she worked that portion of her time necessary to obtain a ticket-of-leave. Altogether her conduct was far above the average; she was a tractable girl, whom a kind word influenced and a gentle remonstrance visibly affected. Attached to the prison matron of her particular ward, who had evinced that interest in her, and manifested that

kindness, which a good officer desires not to conceal when the prisoner is doing her best to gain her confidence, she served her time out patiently and diligently, and went away with many good wishes for her future well-doing. She departed full of promises; she was certainly going to amend. And the day she stepped beyond the walls she doubtless really intended amendment, and believed in those powers of self-restraint—learned for the first time in a prison—by which she hoped to conquer the early habits to which she had been trained.

Her best friends doubted her promises; for she was returning to Glasgow, where her family still lived, and, consequently, where the greatest danger lay to her moral benefit. Many efforts had been made to induce her to enter a reformatory, but they were unavailing.

She was a tender-hearted girl, and had more love in her heart for her mother and brothers and sisters than they really deserved. She was possessed with a strange yearning for all the old faces; she said she should never see her mother again if she did not take that opportunity to go to Glasgow; the mother was aged, and had written

her one or two affectionate letters during her incarceration,—return to the old home, and the old haunts, she must!

Her stay at Glasgow, she added, would only be short; she would spend a few days with them all, and then proceed in search of a servant's place and adopt the new life to which she had solemnly pledged herself. At the Euston Square station she repeated her promise to the matron who saw her start for the North; and the energy with which she called God to witness her intentions to keep pure and honest thenceforth, was sufficient to carry conviction even to a listener accustomed to such promises, and knowing too well what fallacies they almost invariably proved.

Some twelvemonths passed at Brixton Prison; they were beginning to forget Macklin, when the woman who had been a model prisoner, and had gone away resolving to amend, reappeared under the old circumstances—found in the bad company she had promised to abjure. So the ticket-of-leave was revoked, and the sentence was to be worked out in full. Her shame and remorse, after the first effort at composure and bravado, were

pitiable to witness. She did not mind!—what was to be expected?—who cared for her?—what did it matter to any one save herself?—were her first sullen remarks; but the past associations that the prison brought to her mind, the resumption of the duties which had been given up for liberty, the sorrow and concern of the chaplain, rather than the sharp rebuke for her backsliding—gradually softened a character that twelve months of the old society had tended to harden. She fell once more into the usual routine, exhibiting by degrees almost her former exemplary conduct.

I say almost, for the first year of her new imprisonment witnessed some flashes of irritation and excitability. The matron who had been formerly kind to her had left the service; there were faces amongst the officers which were strange to her. As a rule, I have said, the long hours of duty make havoc in the ranks of prison matrons—and there was one little break-out, one passionate kick to a cleaning pail, offences which were not treated severely, but still sufficient to debar her transfer at a fitting period to Fulham.

Still Macklin was a woman who took readily to those who evinced an interest in her, and at the end of the first year she began to betray an attachment—almost the fond, faithful attachment of a dog to its mistress—for the matron whose duties brought Macklin within her jurisdiction.

Macklin was not long in obtaining her badge, and in procuring, by her diligence and obedience, those little privileges conferred by the prison officers upon their best women. She demonstrated at that time, and till the last day of her sentence, a greater willingness and gentleness than even in the first three years of her incarceration; and evinced every day a greater affection for her matron. She was scrupulously honest in prison, waiting on the matron, attending to her room, left in charge of it, with opportunities of abstracting little articles of jewellery, or money, or even a watch; but she never broke the trust placed in her, and remained the honest servant whom nothing could tempt from her fealty. She

had always mourned her return to prison, till the matron's interest in her awakened her love; then she gave over repining, and became cheerful, and even happy.

"If I had not come back, lassie, I shouldn't have known ye," was her remark once, "and had no one to care for me. And ye do care for me a little noo?" was her anxious inquiry.

And the matron did care for her, albeit she constantly made efforts to maintain the grave, equable demeanour expected from prison matrons in general. The matron was more than a common judge of human nature—I have had many opportunities of observing her rare discriminating powers—and saw quickly the natural faults of character which had led Macklin wrong in one instance, and might lead her a second time, if steps were not taken to prevent it.

Making no show of an attempt at reformation, keeping back her idea of what was the best and proper method to reform this erring sister, she quietly and unostentatiously began

her work, and added this great task to the manifold duties already imperative on her. The chaplain and she were both working quietly for one end; but her words had the greatest weight with Macklin, for she was loved most, was one of her own sex, to whom the erring woman could tell the whole story of the sin that had ended in shame, and finally consigned her to the cells of a prison.

To be brief, Macklin changed perceptibly, and became a graver, sadder, and more earnest woman. As her time grew less, the old promises were reiterated—and again doubted by all but the matron and the chaplain. They were both sanguine, this woman was so different from all with whom they had come in contact during the last three years.

There were certainly grave reasons for doubting her promises of amendment. Macklin was once more going back for a day or two to her old haunts at Glasgow. She was anxious once more to see that mother who had, at least, always been kind to her, and

was now old and blind; and to tell her that all the past was forgiven, and that she had made up her mind to lead a new life. Those who heard her could not but anticipate the danger which she incurred by going, could not but express their fears that, as in so many other cases in their experience, the promises she had made of perseverance in the path of virtue would all be disappointed.

Prison chaplain and prison matron, however, were hopeful. Class distinctions prevented them working together, and they knew little, if anything, of each other's plans. The chaplain obtained from the Prisoners' Aid Society permission to receive Macklin on her return from Glasgow —a generous concession, that showed no blind bigotry to set rules, and which deserves publicity in this age of stupid precedents.*

As a pleasant picture of the heartiness with which a true Christian works, it may be mentioned here that the chaplain of the prison suddenly

*As a rule, a discharged prisoner must proceed direct from prison to the Prisoners' Aid, depositing her gratuity with the Secretary, as a guarantee of good faith.

woke in his bed one morning, with the terrible thought that the train to Glasgow started early, and that he had forgotten to give the address of the Prisoners' Aid Society to Macklin, who must already have departed with the matron to Euston Square.

Fearing that this little omission might frustrate all the good intentions formed, the chaplain hurriedly dressed himself, ran down the prison lane, —just stopping to inquire of the gate-keeper if the woman were gone, receiving a response in the affirmative. He then went on down the Brixton road at his utmost speed. It was early morning, there were no omnibuses, no cabs could be hired, and the chaplain hurried along the road till a butcher's cart overtook him, and a friendly lift was granted. At last, in a more populous district, a conveyance more fitting the dignity of his cloth was obtained.

Breathless with haste, he finally reached Euston Square, to find a matron and a discharged prisoner waiting on the platform for the train; but the prisoner was not Macklin, nor, in fact, was it the day of her departure, which had been entirely

mistaken by the chaplain. It was another woman whose liberty had come, and it was concerning this woman that the gate-porter had responded, and thus deceived the clergyman.

So there remained plenty of time to communicate with Macklin, and the chaplain, on his return, was the first to turn the tables against himself, by a humorous narration of his own blunder to the prison matrons.

Macklin went away two days afterwards, reiterating her promises of amendment. She had been given by the Society a week to return, and she had pledged her word to "enter an appearance" long before the expiration of her days of grace.

"Come and see me, dear Miss ——, at the Prisoners' Aid," was her last injunction, as the train swept her away northwards; "I shall be sure to be there."

She went away full of hope, and the matron was also sanguine, till the days of the week went on, bringing no news of Macklin — till the week passed, and the society's doors were closed against the unfortunate woman, who was

thrown on the world again—that dark and wicked world which had already been her ruin.

She had broken her word, and there seemed no hope for her. In the last fight the tempter had apparently triumphed. On the very threshold of her new estate her hold had relaxed, and almost within reach of salvation, her weak heart yielded. Hoping to the last, the prison matron wrote to Glasgow, asking Macklin for the particulars of her breach of faith, and, in due course, the reply came—a sorrowful, remorseful reply, that explained everything.

Macklin had reached home, been welcomed by her friends, seen her old mother, and was thinking of her return, when the money that had been set apart to pay her passage back to London was found to have *suddenly disappeared!* There was no hope of her obtaining a sufficient sum to return; she was ashamed to write and tell the story, and she was therefore compelled to remain in Glasgow. A faint hope that her old and true friend would advance the money, and the fear that she had forfeited her right to be believed, and would be left to her misery and degradation,

were apparent in the tone and spirit of the letter.

The Prisoners' Aid Society was consulted again; for the energy of the untiring, kind-hearted matron knew no diminution. The point was argued, warmly contested, and the secretary giving way, consented to receive the repentant woman. The prison matron, from her own hard-earned salary, advanced the sum requisite to bring Macklin to London, confiding it to the care of a clergyman in Glasgow.

The passage was paid, and Macklin, on arriving in London, placed herself in the charge of the Prisoners' Aid Society, which shortly afterwards procured her a situation. She entered service as housemaid in a family in the suburbs of London, where her industry and honesty so speedily gained the confidence of her employers, that the house was left to her entire trust and management during the family's absence for six weeks from town. I believe she is still living honestly, struggling to better her condition, and that no one has had cause to regret his or her part in this little drama of real life. That the chaplain may be a bishop

some day, and that the matron may reach the top of the tree, is the hearty wish of one who has known and respected both of them!

CHAPTER XX.

SUNDAY IN BRIXTON PRISON.

It will be interesting to most of my readers to learn how Sunday is spent by our female prisoners. When their work is set aside, and the peace and rest natural to the day prevail even in these prison wards, what is their routine of duty, and how does it affect the women?

As a break in the rules and regulations common to working days, Sunday is accept-

able to most women. Some little respect is shown for the Sabbath even by the most obstinate prisoners. The instances of insubordination are less on that day than on any other throughout the week. At Brixton Prison, where the privileges are greater than at Millbank, any disturbance on a Sunday is an unlooked-for incident.

In an early chapter on prison routine, I directed the attention of my readers to Millbank, following step by step, to the best of my ability, the progress of a prisoner's every-day life in that place of confinement. In the present, for the sake of a little contrast, I will select Brixton as the subject of my sketch.

It may be premised that, save a greater number of "solitaries," less association, and no tea, the rules are very similar to those of Millbank. In fact, an insight into the working of one prison affords a fair example of the whole system.

As there is some difference between the three classes of prisoners, we will commence with the lowest of the Old Prison women. On Sundays these women are allowed to have an hour's

longer rest, rising at seven o'clock in lieu of six, to arrange their cells, &c., preparatory to the breakfast hour.

At a quarter to eight the matron passes down the ward with two women, whose turn it may be to assist, one carrying the cocoa, the other a basket of loaves. The matron stops at each cell, measures out the cocoa, and gives a loaf to each woman. The cell door is then shut, and the matron and her attendants proceed on their way. In the cells of the women in attendance the allotted breakfast portion is left until the round is made, and if any liquid remains at the bottom of the cocoa-can, they consider it their remuneration for extra services, and appropriate it accordingly. This is not permitted by the rules, but it has become so much a custom of the prisoners and prison matrons, that the withdrawal of this privilege would entail no small amount of discontent. As the women wait attendance in turn, no undue preference is evinced.

Breakfast over, the prisoners—with the exception of those who may be undergoing punishment—are allowed to associate till a quarter

past ten. Two remain in a cell, talking in a subdued voice till the chapel bell rings, when the hum of this human hive ceases, and all proceed in regular order to chapel, passing on to the two upper galleries, and leaving the body for the East and West Wing women. When all the prisoners are assembled, full service is performed; and, considering the nature of these women, and their little powers of self-restraint, the attention they pay, and the good order that is everywhere kept, are remarkable.

That the chaplain's exhortations, for the most part, have but little effect, may be readily imagined from the character of the congregation; but still, here and there, the good seed falls at times on good ground and bears fruit. Preaching, even in prisons, is not always an idle ceremony—dry, unprofitable, and disheartening. These prisoners' feelings can be touched occasionally. I have twice been a witness to as much sorrow and emotion on the part of these careless and hardened women as could have been exhibited by any congregation of gently-

nurtured, well-educated ladies — once in the very chapel where we suppose our prisoners to be assembled. It happened that Julia McCoy, one of the prisoners, had died during the previous week; and the officiating minister took advantage of the occurrence to speak of her death, and of the circumstances connected with it, in simple, earnest language, that struck home to these stubborn hearts, and brought tears into all eyes.

It was an affecting sight. Here were women whose whole term of imprisonment had been an outrage against common sense and propriety, making the chapel echo with their sobs. Some of them had committed murder, infanticide, and other crimes that degrade our poor humanity, and yet they were now weeping like children at the thought of their fellow-prisoner's natural death. The subject was well chosen and skilfully handled. The right chord had been struck. Purer, better thoughts were rising from their souls, that morning, than any one had ever imagined they were capable of conceiving.

Still one sermon will not regenerate a prison; and although some good possibly followed it, yet I cannot honestly aver that there was much sign of general amendment. Some of the women were even so unsettled as to "break out" shortly afterwards. The new thoughts troubled them, and they were under the necessity of shaking them off, otherwise they would go mad. It was better to be back to the old life than to be troubled with *them;* and so the glass was soon crashing in the wards again, and the dark cells were once more full of inmates!

After chapel is over the prisoners return to their cells and wait for dinner, which is ready at a quarter to one. It is served in a similar manner to the breakfast. Before two o'clock all the women are dressed for exercise; at which hour exactly they—the old prison women—pass into the airing-ground, three wards at a time (only one ward is allowed out on week days), and walk in pairs round the ground. On Sundays there is often some difficulty in keeping the increased numbers in fair order. They are the lowest class of

women, and the least subordinate; and, if the matron is not prompt in checking them, they will stand in little groups, arguing and quarrelling amongst themselves.

This exercise continues till three o'clock, when the women return to their wards, and are allowed a companion to supper.* The humming of the prisoners' voices is heard again. Occasionally the "pals" become too excited, and talk more loudly than is approved of by their officers. Now and then a merry peal of laughter echoes strangely, almost unnaturally, along the wards, and order is once more enjoined. After tea the chapel bell rings them to evening service, which is concluded at a quarter or twenty minutes past seven, when they are led back to their cells and locked up for the night.

With the East Wing or second-class women, the routine is somewhat varied. As in the old

* It has been already stated that there are no teas, only gruel suppers, for prisoners of this class. East Wing women have tea every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday only. Those first-class women for whom there is no room in the West Wing are not included in this rule.

prison, they have their breakfast at a quarter past eight, but at nine in the morning exercise begins in the airing-ground, where they walk two and two, after the usual fashion, till ten. They attend chapel at the same time as the other women, and are then taken back to their separate cells and dinners. At two they are allowed to sit outside their cell doors and converse; at half-past three they walk again in the airing-ground for half an hour or forty minutes, and then, returning, are locked in their cells for supper. The association outside their cells is considered more than equivalent for the association and tea in the old prison. There have been instances of prisoners eluding the vigilance of the matrons, and forming little associations of their own.

It is an interesting sight to see the prisoners sitting outside their cells until the principal matron's voice is heard pronouncing the order, "Shut your cells." The scene then changes like magic, and, after the rattle, rattle of the closing doors, the ward is left deserted and silent. Women scheming for extra association

sometimes contrive not to shut their cell doors closely, having insinuated a piece of paper into the lock to prevent an accurate catch. When the matron has gone down the ward, the door is cautiously opened, the prisoner flits rapidly to her "pal's" cell, turns the handle, and enters.

A discovery is sometimes made, and punishment is awarded. Occasionally the prisoner altogether escapes detection—although I fear I shall have some difficulty in inducing any prison matron who may read this to believe my statement.

This trick, I must say, is seldom tried with an old officer. When a young officer, new to the duties, is in charge, the attempt is more often made. When knives were in use amongst the prisoners, they would often betray their secret association by omitting to pass them, according to the general rule, under the doors after dinner.

At twenty minutes to six the chapel bell rings. After chapel the East Wing women are not locked up like those of the old prison, but are allowed to sit in association at their cell doors again till a quarter to eight, when the signal is given,

the doors are slammed, and the matron remains alone in the centre of the ward.

The West Wing prisoners, or first class, are still more favoured. On Sunday, in lieu of an hour and a half, they have two hours exercise in the airing-ground. They have also the privilege of tea.

On Christmas Day there is a general tea and association all over the prison. This is the one exception to the routine of the year.

The women are generally better behaved on Sunday. It has struck me more than once that the best women—those of all classes distinguished for their good conduct—are often grave and thoughtful. Now and then a matron suddenly entering a cell finds a prisoner in tears; and it is always one who has had some semblance of a home in early days, with a kind father and mother.

Such women *must* be touched by these prison Sundays, when they think of the days when they were innocent, and had not gone astray; when the real friends, whose advice they had scorned, were living.

"I'm a-thinking of my old mother, miss,"

one woman said to me once; "she'll be going to church now, across the fields—all alone, and thinking o' me who ought to be with her. I went with her every Sunday once," she added, a little proudly.

"This day ten years I was sitting in my Sunday school," another of the well-behaved women will say. "Oh! dear, wasn't I different, miss, then? I never thought of being in this place!"

These little remarks crop out not unfrequently, and are generally made to the matron, very seldom to a fellow-prisoner.

A prisoner is not always in a mood to receive such confidences; and if her disposition is bad, she will probably taunt her companion with her better "bringings up."

Sundays, with the Catholic prisoners, are varied by the performance, between eight and nine in the morning, of divine service by the priest. As this leaves the day somewhat of a blank, some women will attend Protestant service also, whilst others prefer to remain in their cells, and sleep till dinner-time. Many women who

are of a brooding or indolent nature, I fancy, are Catholics for no other reason than the Sunday's "skulk," the Thursday's confession from three till four, and the absence from chapel in the week days. Government shows no religious intolerance in our prisons, and provides a priest for women of the Roman Catholic persuasion—or for such as choose to assert that that is their religion. I wonder if there is a Catholic prison under heaven, where a Protestant minister is allowed regularly to attend. I wonder, after all, whether we are quite right in allowing these priests the entry of our prisons.

Sunday, which is a change for the women, offers also some little variation to the matrons, three or four out of each division leaving early in the morning, or on the previous Saturday after six; P.M.,—if it is their night off duty,—and returning at ten, P.M., on the evening of the Sunday. Matrons at Brixton and Millbank are granted leave of absence on every third Sunday, if there be no matrons ill; some of the chief officers are fortunate enough to have every alternate Sunday at their own disposal.

These are golden days in the matron's calendar! —days so highly prized, and looked forward to so hopefully, that if alternate Sundays were the general rule, I think the Directors would be remembered in the matron's prayers. It is beyond my power to describe graphically the sensations of a young woman passing out of the great gates into the free air beyond the prison walls; shaking off the sense of her arduous duties and responsibilities, and looking forward to a day of freedom, with bright and hopeful faces round her. These changes tend to keep the matron healthy, and give her strength of mind to follow on the path of duty and strive for the pension that rewards ten years' service. But the shadow of prison duties sits upon her even in her holidays, if she is an earnest, thoughtful matron. What she has omitted to do, what she might have done better —whether she was not too harsh in that report, or whether that woman who threatened her life will ever attempt it when a chance presents itself, are thoughts which will suggest themselves even in those brighter days that are so few and far between.

But looking back at the title of this chapter, I find I have wandered from the subject: Sunday in Brixton Prison. On the evening of that day, the matron may be seen hurrying down the prison lane, anxious to report her reappearance before the great clock in the archway strikes ten. Five minutes after that hour is an infringement of rule, and is punished by a deduction from the salary; and yet, true to our woman's habits of unpunctuality, we will linger over the last parting till we are a little late, the consequence of which will be that our month's drawbacks will tell us of a deficit.

At ten o'clock, after a glance at the mess-room, a little chat with the night officer, or with a sister matron who has arrived at the same time, and has some little home incident to relate, the Sunday is at an end for the officers as well as for those whom they guard.

CHAPTER XXI.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—LETTY COOPER.

LIFE is more full of remarkable coincidences than most of us suppose. Strange meetings happen every day. Faces that we thought lost to us for ever, rise up in the streets to startle us. I remember two strange meetings the narration of which will strike my readers as more resembling those of romance than reality. The more wonderful I reserve for another opportunity; the other forms the subject of this chapter.

A very good and efficient matron of my former acquaintance—whose name I should like to insert

here—was often accustomed to amuse us at the mess-room table by stories of her old home at Norwood. She used to speak of a little dark-faced gipsy-girl, calling frequently at her father's house near Westlow Hill. She was the youngest daughter of the well-known Coopers, and was a sharp girl, strangely shy, though of a bold disposition. The Coopers claimed to be of pure royal blood; and the eldest of the house—an old dark-skinned woman, the grandmother of the little girl I speak of—designated herself the queen of the gipsies, and, amongst the numerous tribes of these wanderers that came and went, her claim to that title was never once disputed.

The grandchild of this royal personage was accustomed to stand before the window, or loiter before the door, of the matron's home, pleased to be noticed, and more pleased by the gift of a stray penny. Occasionally her brother, some years older than herself, would come with her in the hope of obtaining a similar present, and join in the conversation that took place at an open window in the summer time. Both were merry, agile gipsy children, whose gambols on Norwood Common

reminded one of acrobatic feats, such as children left to run wild will occasionally imitate.

When the Norwood coach was expected—there were coaches on the road then—Letty and her brother Vangelo were accustomed to run beside it up the hill, throwing those "flip-flaps" and summersaults that have since become a popular institution amongst our juvenile Bohemians. Other members of the Cooper family speculated in donkeys, patronized little Letty, laughed at her antics, and, doubtless, appropriated the greater part of her pocket-money.

Between Letty and the elder sisters of our matron there was quite an intimacy. Letty, who was a faithful messenger, was frequently employed to run on errands. She would occasionally intercept the ladies in their walks, drop her best curtsey, and look askance at them out of her dark flashing eyes. In their presence she was always demure. If they detected her in any of her gambols on the Common, she would shyly conceal herself behind the furze. In the summer time, before starting down the hill to meet the Norwood coach, she would wreath round her hair a garland

of poppies, buttercups, and daisies. Sometimes she would insist on her grandmother thus adorning her. A wild little elf she looked, as she ran beside the coach, with her wreath dropping over her forehead, and her dark eyes half-blinded with the dust raised by the wheels.

Leaving Norwood some time after this, the matron lost sight of Letty Cooper. Years brought their usual changes. Deaths and marriages occurred in her family, and, in the course of events, our narrator entered Government service as a prison matron.

At Millbank Prison she met with Letty Cooper again. The latter was now a woman—I regret to add, one of the worst. The years that had elapsed since they last met must have rapidly deteriorated the character of the gipsy girl. The woman had not fulfilled the promise of the girl. Evil passions had stamped their indelible imprint on her face, which was now without a single feminine trait to render it attractive. Although not more than nineteen or twenty, she might have passed for twice that age. Her swarthy and seared countenance had a settled expression of

bold and shameless wickedness, such as I have rarely seen in the face of one so young.

She was already old in prison experience. She had passed from gaol to gaol, one sentence following fast upon another, and each succeeding period of imprisonment increasing in length. She had passed through an apprenticeship in crime, her acts of violence gradually assuming a more daring and lawless character. She was now a prisoner in Millbank, serving out a sentence of several years for stabbing a man in a drunken brawl.

On one occasion, when associated with her fellow-prisoners in the airing ground, she related to them the particulars of the act of violence for which she was imprisoned. It was told with a good deal of boasting, with some humour, and with much characteristic gesticulation. As a matter of course, it was loudly applauded by the majority of her companions.

"You should have seen the beggar jump when I pricked him—like this somehow," I heard her say one day in a whisper to her companions; but as I was close upon her, she was warned by some subdued shuffling not to continue the subject.

Letty had never recognized our matron, who did not care to remind her of their past acquaintance. As she was not her officer, she only saw her when her duties took her for a few minutes to that particular ward. Cooper was not long in association. Her propensities for breaking out were as marked as those of her contemporaries, and she flitted as often as any of them from her cell to the "dark," and from the "dark" to her cell. Being an expert boxer, and possessed of considerable muscular strength, she gave much trouble to the guards who were called in to remove her. Doubling her fists, she would go at her "persecutors" in true prize-fighting style, swearing volubly all the time, and heaping maledictions on every officer's head. In her quiet moods—after her health began rapidly to decline —Letty was fond of discoursing of her royal origin, of her grandmother, the queen of the gipsies, and of the reverence which was paid her by all the nomadic tribes in England.

At Brixton Prison she was accustomed to relate strange stories of gipsy life. Many of them were of such a wonderful character that the

women would not believe them, and, considering that Letty was rather of a mendacious turn, they were quite justified in their disbelief.

She gave early signs of a consumptive tendency. Prison fare, her own unruly conduct, and, above all, the want of fresh air, which to a gipsy girl was life, appeared to hasten the progress of the disease. Her spirits became more variable. As for any sign of repentance it was never expected from one of her callous nature. She was equally profane, both in her quiet and her passionate moods. She was inordinately vain of her dancing. When there was a chance of her going through her performances unobserved by the prison authorities, she would amuse her companions by her saltatory feats—leaping, shuffling, cutting sixes, and twirling round and round with marvellous rapidity.

"I was spiled—I ought to have been brought up to the stage, and cut a figure there. I could dance half the actors' heads off.

If she was complimented on her skill, and her own favourable opinion of her abilities confirmed

by that of her fellow-prisoners, she would be placable for the remainder of the day.

If she was carried to the refractory cells, she would often practise her dancing throughout the night, and keep prisoners and prison matrons restless with her quick beats on the floor. I think she must have had a visionary hope of making her fortune by that art when her liberty was granted.

One of her dances must have been entirely of her own invention, it was so odd and characteristic. There was a peculiar Juba element about it. It consisted of a series of rapid, regular beats with the heel and toe alternately, which, when heard in the dead of night, had a frenzying effect on the listener. Occasionally the night matron would attempt a remonstrance, and Letty in return would assail her with a torrent of slang and Romany, dancing all the time to keep herself in practice. Like most of the violent women, whilst the excitement of an outbreak was upon her, she was almost mad and often dangerous. There was no reasoning with her; she had done her worst and been punished to the utmost. Now she would have

"her fling," and dance, sing, or do what she pleased. If the matron continued her remonstrance, Letty would fly at the door, beat it with her fists, and scream at the top of her voice.

She became worse. Her strength rapidly failed, and it was thought that she would not live her sentence at Brixton out.

When she lay very ill in the Infirmary, the matron who had known her came to see her, and ventured to speak of the past—to remind her of Norwood, and of the time when she was a little dark-faced girl running wild upon the Common.

"Did you know me then?" she asked curiously.

"Yes."

"Do you remember my grandmother?" she asked; adding, with her old pride, "She was queen of the gipsies, miss. There's been a good many queens amongst the Coopers. We've been allus the head of the gipsies."

She became curious to know in what part of Norwood the matron had lived, and why, if she had recognized her before, she had not spoken to her.

When our fellow-officer reminded her of the

time whon she used to run messages for her elder sisters, she winced a little, and from that day spoke more deferentially to that particular matron. After recovering sufficient strength to leave the Infirmary, she even obeyed instructions from her, which, from others, she would have treated with neglect. But she was untrustworthy and violent to the last.

She continued to regard this matron with considerable interest, and, when she was in one of her better moods, would condescend to address a few words to her.

"Do you remember my brother, Miss ——?" she asked once.

"Vangelo?—to be sure."

"He's come to grief too. He's locked up in prison. We were allus a hot lot!" she added, with a short laugh.

She gradually became weaker, lost her energy, and showed every day sure signs that the sands were running out. All night, in the wards, the hollow cough rang out. Every day she became more unable to do her allotted share of work. She became, at last, a confirmed in-

firmary patient, and used to amuse the other invalids with her old stories of gipsy life, and of the royal blood that circulated in her veins.

"My brother Vangelo would have been king of the gipsies if he had not been lagged," she boasted.

After her return to the infirmary she sank rapidly. True to the doctor's prophecy, despite all the care and kind attention that sick prisoners receive at Brixton, she breathed her last before her prison service ended.

CHAPTER XXII.

PRISON MATRONS IN GENERAL.—SECOND ARTICLE.

REPERUSING my article on prison matrons in general, I find that there still remains much to be said concerning them, in order to afford my readers a thorough insight into their duties, and I may add into their characters. I reserve, for a special chapter in my next volume, a few remarks on matrons' extra duties, and confine myself here to a few discursive anecdotes relating to their position and duties.

I have already spoken of their leading grievance—long hours; but I find that I have omitted to mention that which tends to make those long hours more wearisome and unendurable—a want of proper, and, at times, wholesome food. I have no doubt that this plain statement will give rise to many angry denials on the part of those interested in the matter; still it is due to society to state proofs in support of my complaint, which stewards, directors, and contractors are quite willing to give the lie to—*if they can!*

In the first place, I may state that the meat provided for the prisoners is generally of a good quality; but by some strange inconsistency, or by some mismanagement in the cookery, that provided for the prison matrons is not always good, and, at times not few and far between, decidedly and disgracefully bad.

I do not know, I have never sought to inquire, what the opinion of the warders on this point may be—they have stronger stomachs and coarser appetites, mayhap—but it is certainly true that, in our mess-room, the joints occasionally go

away untasted, and, such is the objection of the matrons to "fussiness," often uncomplained of. Ribs of beef, and legs and shoulders of mutton, are the staple commodities of diet; but beef and mutton of so extraordinary a flavour, that the riddle is on what green pastures these oxen and sheep could have been originally fattened, or with what strange compound the joints can be basted in the prison kitchen, to give to their remains so extraordinary a flavour. So peculiarly goatish is it at times, that "goat," at our female government prisons, has become the general appellative for mutton; and as it is like no other mutton either at home or abroad, perhaps one name *is* as good as another.

The complaints I have hinted at are not many; the great question being, of whom to complain? We do not suppose for an instant that the great contractors examine every joint sent out to Government establishments, that the contractors' deputies are ever very particular about our health, or that the prison steward is expected to be taster in ordinary, or inspector-general of the prison kitchen. The question is—of

whom can the prison matrons obtain redress, or from whom may information be expected? In a Parliamentary inquiry into Government Contracts in 1856, the question was put to one witness—whether he thought Government contracts were fulfilled as faithfully as other contracts, and he expressed it as extremely doubtful. Whether this accounts for oily beef and goatish mutton, I am not able to decide.

But I know that beyond the prison walls there is a gentleman of my acquaintance, who holds office under Government, and whose business it is to see that the contracts for his department are faithfully fulfilled, who plainly asserts that it is his greatest trial to see that Government is fairly dealt by. He adds that attempts to sap his honesty were frequently made in his early days of office, and are made indirectly still; that invitations to contractors' shooting-boxes, country residences, etc., are being constantly pressed upon him, and that his acceptance of a handsome Christmas-box would be considered as a favour. Are there any handsome presents made, and kind invitations given,

to gentlemen in prison office, whose verdict on the meat might make matters unpleasant to contractors?—or is the fault really in the cooking, after all? At times, the matrons have protested, but the steward has asserted that he saw nothing wrong in the meat, that it was very good meat, *considering*, and he has sometimes recommended the ladies of —— ward to be a little less particular. And that kind advice is attended to. Perhaps it *is* only fancy, after all, and the prison air has spoiled the appetite and rendered the ladies fastidious! The next day, therefore, the matrons sit down "with a will," and try to laugh the matter off, but the old flavour is still predominant. There will be no remonstrance perhaps for a week or two. The prison matrons will substitute suppers at their own expense, in lieu of mess-room dinners. If another feeble remonstrance should be made, the steward shakes his head and mourns over the fastidiousness of human nature, that will not see every excellence in prison cooking and contractors' mutton.

Sometimes the surgeon will be solicited for

his verdict on the question, which he gives to the effect that *he* can't see much the matter with the meat. I even remember one gentleman falling into raptures over a plateful of mutton which had made half the prison matrons sick. He only wished that such meat were provided for his own table, that was all!

As prison matrons are always considered in the wrong, and complaints of this nature are regarded in a light almost impertinent, it has been considered policy to swallow anything, and say nothing. But if a director or governor would look in at the mess-room dinner-hour, and try an honest plateful—not a fastidious, mincing nibble, be it understood—the chances are that, from the ill-effects of the meat on his patrician stomach, some good to prison servants might arise.

Attempts have been made more than once to memorialize the authorities on the subject, but the nervousness with which strong measures are generally regarded has always interfered with the project, some refusing to sign from the fear of dismissal. In many instances there are mothers,

sisters, and little children to support, and rather than incur any risk, they endure this with all the other evils that "flesh is heir to."

Still, I reiterate, there is much good feeling shown by the heads of the establishment to the matrons, and it is rarely that any one in office stands upon the order of his or her dignity.

It is pleasant to speak of the frequent efforts of the principals to offer some little change, after the hours of duty, to the matrons. Reading-rooms have been thought of, and abandoned. At Brixton the experiment was tried, some years ago, of a little music, in a room across the yard. But the music led to a quadrille now and then, and it was thought advisable to send the piano back to the maker, and rescind the privilege.

I do not know that any privilege within the prison would be very acceptable to the matrons; such is their craving, when health and strength permit, to pass beyond the gates and shake the prison dust from their feet. Outside may be waiting mothers, sisters, even faithful

swains, and the busy streets appear to them like another world. At ten o'clock the matrons must be home again, or fines, averaging from sixpence to five shillings, will follow each minute's delay.

It is strange how well the faces of prison matrons are known to the cabmen on the ranks adjacent to both female prisons. A prison matron in Palace Yard, for instance, is a signal for the hasty disappearance of the majority of the cabmen from the ranks. If one is addressed, a solemn assurance is given that they are everyone engaged to gentlemen at the "House"—sixpenny fares being very much objected to. Thus officers who have lingered to the last moment with their friends find themselves greatly impeded in their attempts to reach Millbank in time to save a fine and a report.

Matrons have their little parties at times, too—quietly smuggled parties of three or four favourite sisters—in their bedrooms, after the mess-room supper is over, and when it is supposed that all female officers are in their beds. But these are golden days—occurring only once a-year—and as they are

contrary to rule, I must not say too much about them. These are happy little meetings, however, all the more delightful perhaps for the fear of discovery, reminding some of us of old boarding-school days, when Madame Martello was sleeping. Mice will play when the cat's away, even in so uncongenial a place for honest merriment—within the "limits of becoming mirth"—as a Government prison.

The matrons have their little jealousies as well as their little loves and likings for each other. The sudden rise of a clever officer leads here and there to a faint exhibition of uncharitableness. "Promoted by merit" is a phrase hard for old officers to understand, especially those who have no particular merit to boast of. Still, in all offices, these little *contretemps* occur. Why then should I dwell on this recollection of my prison experience? Perhaps there is a little more excitement in the prison than in the outer world when the chance of a rise occurs, and feelings of disappointment at the result are expressed more openly than amongst the clerks at Somerset House or the Bank of England, for the female

nature is not reticent, and ladies will speak their minds occasionally. I have only to say, with regard to the promotions, that they appear, as far as my knowledge goes, to have been always made with great fairness and discrimination. No injustice, and very little favouritism, are apparent in the appointments.

I have already spoken of the steady rise of one officer from the post of assistant matron to that of deputy superintendent. I should not be doing justice to another very efficient deputy, if I failed to mention the name of Mrs. Harpour, late of Brixton Prison, now of Fulham Refuge.

I consider that much of the effective discipline of Brixton Prison is due to this lady's former connection with it. She was the originator of many clever rules, for which she is entitled to the highest credit.

Amongst the officers of Millbank Prison, let me express my honest conviction that, for tact, judgment, and perseverance, Miss Crossgrove, matron of that establishment, stands pre-eminent.

In concluding this part of my subject, I would wish to suggest a change of name for prison

officers. Possibly it is not a matter of much importance, but "officer" is almost a noun masculine, "matron" is altogether a misnomer, and both names convey an idea of harshness and ugliness singularly at variance with the bearers thereof. If "sisters" were not too Roman Catholic a term, or did not suggest the nunnery so strongly, I know of no more appropriate designation. They are sisters in their efforts to do their duty, and to work, in their humble way, some little good—sisters in their interest for those poor creatures who are confided to their care—and sisters in their friendship and good-will towards each other.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PRISON CHARACTERS.—TOWERS.

In Colonel Chesterton's "Revelations of Prison Life," the author prefaces his remarks on one or two prisoners by stating that it would be false delicacy to conceal their true names under initials or assumed cognomens. If that remark applies to any of the characters in this chronicle of prison life, it does assuredly to Towers.

There are no feelings to outrage in her case; her acts of violence were always a subject of much boasting; all sense of shame or common decency must have been stifled in her infancy. Still I do not adopt her real name; she is of an honest family, and may be leading a new life.

Towers was sentenced to four years' penal servitude, for stealing from the person, I believe, and the day of her introduction to Millbank Prison was a sad one for the prison officers. Not that she was the most violent woman who ever entered, for physical reasons, hereafter to be mentioned, prevented that; but she was the most untruthful, malicious, lewd, and horrible being that even prison matrons had ever hitherto met with.

It is with some reluctance that I attempt to describe this woman, but it may be interesting to students of human nature to have an outline of her character—albeit it is impossible for a woman's pen to fill in all the shadings with that depth and intensity necessary for a truthful portraiture.

There is much in prison detail that is unapproachable; and the story of Towers's prison life cannot be dwelt on in all its horrible minuteness. Two men, whose minds loved to grope in dark places, might have been glad of such an eccentric character for a story or romance—Edgar Allan Poe and Eugene Sue.

Towers was not more than three or four and

twenty—in the prison-books, I believe, her age is registered as less than that—when she first entered Millbank Prison. Physiognomists might have guessed much of her character from her countenance—it was so disproportionate and revolting. A white-faced ape would have been something like her; and there was a look in her black eyes which one shuddered to encounter. She was a cripple, and had to be carried in. The loss of the use of her limbs, however, by some early accident, had been no check upon her criminal propensities. In a word, she was all that was bad—even the prisoners were horrified at her.

"She's like the devil hisself, isn't she, miss?" one woman, who was not noted for good behaviour herself, remarked once. How she reached Brixton, save on medical grounds, I have ever been at a loss to discover; but certain it is that thither she was conveyed in due course, being carried from a cab through the prison-yards to the cell set apart for her.

She was accustomed to lie on her bed for several days together, refusing to get up—alleging, with the most awful oaths, her inability

to move; praying, with a horrible earnestness, that further calamities might fall upon her; and that blindness, leprosy, and fifty other ills might seize upon those who worried her by entreating her to rise. I do not remember that she ever went into the airing-yard by her free will or by compulsion either. She had a morbid satisfaction in remaining in bed, in using every endeavour, by refusing food, and even by injuring herself, to make herself ill. Blaspheming and singing were her two principal employments. If needlework was given her, she would tear her work to pieces, and swallow the needle to alarm the matron. She was taken to the refractory cells at times, but her crippled condition rendered her removal from them again instantly necessary. The means by which she inflicted injury on herself were sometimes horribly ingenious. She would secrete a piece of glass about her clothing, open her veins with it, and allow them to bleed freely, giving no hint of what she had done. It was only her gradual faintness that gave the alarm, and brought relief to her, otherwise she would probably have bled stoically to death in her bed. And this happened not once or

twice, but frequently. The closest watching could not prevent her injuring herself.

It soon became absolutely necessary to have a special cell for her, with two women constantly in attendance. Even with these precautions, she would manage to secrete pieces of glass, or jagged pebbles, in her bed; and it became often necessary to remove her, without any warning, to another, and carefully searching her own to remove from it all the dangerous materials which she had collected. By some unsolvable mystery, however, she was never without the means of injuring herself, and the horrible gash by which she blanched the faces of her watchers was often exhibited when least expected. If she was anxious to be taken to the Infirmary, some such scheme she would always adopt, despite the vigilance of the officer; and even there, she has been known to continue the practice of self-injury till her life was despaired of.

She always rallied, however, and allowed herself sufficient time to recover some of her old strength before she would proceed to open her veins again. Indeed there was a business-like method in her

manner of going to work. By way of change she would sometimes powder her glass and swallow it, thus bringing on internal hemorrhage—a practice adopted by more than one prisoner at both Millbank and Brixton.

In her cell, as in the infirmary, Towers knew no respect for time or place. Her principal amusement in either was lying on her back, and yelling, at the top of her voice, Dick Turpin's supposed song of "My bonny black Bess."

> "Then while I've a bottle, what can I do less,
> Than drink to the health of my bonny black Bess?"

became as familiar to the ears of the prison matrons of Towers's ward, as to any lover of Bacchanalian songs at a low beer-shop.

She had also some talent for extemporizing ballads —neither appropriate, select, nor decent—in which the names of her officers were brought in, coupled with much violent and abusive language; but her efforts generally were not well sustained, and after a while she would slide back into "My bonny black Bess."

Sometimes she would lie in bed, and scream

for help, till assistance arrived, when she would struggle up into a sitting posture, and fling every available utensil in her cell at the light, or at the heads of the officers—she was not particular which —accompanying each effort with an oath, or some horrible expression that made the blood run cold.

There were times when she could be persuaded or humoured into quietness, but the continuance of her good behaviour was uncertain, and she always wound up with one of her extraordinary feats. Despite her inability to make use of her limbs, she was ingenious enough in "breaking out." When she was considered safe and quiet for the night, and too weak to do much mischief, she would wriggle out of bed, shuffle herself to the cell walls, to which she would cling with one hand, smashing the glass with the other, and shrieking, all the while, like an imp of darkness. When the men were sent to remove her, she had a peculiarly vicious way of resisting them. She would butt at them with her head, and before her habits were known, the guards, unprepared for this mode of attack, lost several teeth, and received many black eyes. In the Infirmary she would suddenly drop from

her bed, and, with an eel-like writhe, make for the bedside of other prisoners, and with demoniac satisfaction smash the basins that might be there. Attached to the Infirmary there are three cells for such patients as are refractory even in their illness. The one most remote from the Infirmary was generally Towers's habitation during the period of her illness or convalescence; and at all hours of the day and night the sick women would be kept restless by that abominable refrain of "drinking to the health of my bonny Black Bess," which she would continue to ring out with untiring energy.

"Oh! how I *do* wish that cussed Towers was dead!" I have heard an invalid, turning restlessly in her bed, exclaim; but Towers continued to live, a torment to all in the prison, opening veins with impunity, and, at the imminent risk of breaking a blood-vessel, singing, or rather shouting out at the top of her voice, the praises of "my bonny Black Bess."

It became necessary at last to construct a special "convalescent cell" for Towers. An unoccupied room among the dark cells was set apart for her,

where, with two female prisoners ever on the watch, she, struggling against death, continued to drag out her restless and unruly life.

Towers served her time out at Brixton. Defiant and blasphemous, violent and malicious, to the last, she wore out the patience both of prisoners and matrons with her inharmonious praises of Dick Turpin's mare. She was prudent or artful enough to give up the lacerating process during the last few months of her time, that she might gather up some of her old strength for the world into which, an obstinate enemy to its laws, she was again about to enter.

On the day of her liberty she was carried to her cab in charge of a matron, who saw her safely off to Manchester, from which city it is feared she will again appear to horrify the prison service. So vivid was the impression she left behind, that the vision of her corpse-like face, and reminiscences of the words in which she sung the praises of Bonny Black Bess, have since disturbed the rest of many a matron.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PRISONERS' FREEMASONRY.

NOTWITHSTANDING the vigilance of matrons, and the incessant watching to which prisoners are subjected, the latter still contrive to correspond with each other by looks and signs, and even by letters.

Amongst the regular professional thieves there exists a freemasonry very difficult for the matron to detect, and yet simple and comprehensible to those who practise it. Thieving amongst the "regulars" has become a well-disciplined profession. There are many adepts in the art, and

each has a favourite school of disciples. "Jenkinson's School," "Watson's School," and "Smith's School," are the names of these select academies, and the first inquiry with which one thieving prisoner accosts another is, "What *school* do you belong to?"

In these schools the lessons of crime, which is now reduced to a theory, are readily learned by apt pupils, who calculate to a nicety the chances for and against detection. It is said that for one who is captured there are twenty who escape; and in their own opinion it is not the fault of the system they have been taught, but their own ill-luck, or the unskilful manner in which they have practised the principles of their art, that has brought them within the clutches of the law.

The disciples of certain "schools" have peculiar marks, rendered black by gunpowder, tattooed on their arms. Anchors, crosses, and initials are common decorations. Five spots on the left arm are the sign of one school, and three spots between the finger and thumb the distinguishing mark of another.

One woman, who, late in life, had grown tired

of the "schools," and thought of turning over a new leaf, consulted the surgeon as to the best means of eradicating the sign that distinguished her as an adept in crime.

"It's such a disgrace, sir; I must have it out!"

The surgeon paying no heed to her request, or thinking the operation impracticable, the woman proceeded, by means of friction, to wear the skin away into "a fox-bite," which she afterwards put under a course of impromptu poultices, &c., until she succeeded in giving herself a bad arm.

The arm, being subjected to medical treatment, was cured, but, to the intense disgust of the branded one, the mark came out more brilliantly than ever.

The chief means by which correspondence is carried on between women located in different wards, or in cells some distance apart from each other, are the gas-papers, seven of which are given to each prisoner at the beginning of the week—one for each night's gas. Every evening the matron, passing down the ward,

calls out "gas-paper," and one is passed through the inspection-hole in the door, lighted by the matron's candle, and drawn in again by the prisoner, who is supposed to light her gas with it, the matron outside the cell having by this turned it on.

Several *ruses* are resorted to in order to obtain extra gas-papers. "The paper has gone out, miss;" "there's wind in the pipe, and it won't light," and "the paper's burnt out miss," &c. As the gas is escaping all the time, it is impossible to argue the matter with the prisoner, and the extra paper is generally thrust through to her.

On these papers, or "stiffs," as the women invariably term them, are written messages to other prisoners. Words of affection occasionally pass between them; offers to consider some one as a pal from that time forth are made; arrangements for a little break-out, by way of diversion, are communicated; or threats of giving up the person addressed as a pal, and of taking to some one whom she has always liked better—and "so she tells her!"—are sent by this medium.

These messages fly so frequently from one part of the prison to another, and are the cause of so much dissension and excitement amongst the prisoners, that the total suppression of "stiffs" has been more than once under consideration. But it would be difficult to make any other arrangement for the lighting of the prison cells. If the matron were to do it herself, it would entail much extra labour on her. I believe the practice is in vogue to this day.

The means by which they manage to write, to obtain the stump ends of lead pencils—even pens and ink—I will attempt to explain in another chapter. At present it is sufficient to state that the materials for correspondence are almost invariably at hand.

The means by which these messages are conveyed are equally ingenious, and often completely baffle the matron. The difficulties in the way of corresponding with a pal form quite an agreeable excitement in prison life. The pals are, as a rule, in different wings. No one would take the trouble of corresponding with a next door neighbour; but the difficulty of com-

municating with a pal in the east or west wing is a great stimulus to the restless spirits of these women.

The prisoners are obliging to each other. A "stiff" will sometimes have to pass through twenty hands before reaching the woman for whom it is intended. When all the ordinary means of transmission fail, the method of throwing messages, written on small pieces of paper, at chapel, is adopted. The billet is thrown at a moment when the matron's eyes are in another direction, and in nine cases out of ten no discovery is made until the woman who has been so fortunate as to receive the message intended for her betrays the fact by her excitable demeanour.

The prisoners are not faithful in their friendships; on the contrary, they are treacherous, deceitful, and terribly jealous. The tenor of one half the missives is generally a change of pals; and as uncomplimentary epithets are freely used, the recipient resents the affront by an attack on prison property.

The few prisoners contented with a less difficult

mode of correspondence, tap on the walls of their cells, and thus keep each other company. These are the old prison women at Brixton, who have not much association until their general behaviour is put to the test.

Prisoners in the same division find means of corresponding as they pass down the wards to chapel. As the women file by the cells, the doors of which are open, a gas-paper, carefully screwed up, is flung into the well-known cell of the pal with whom communication is desired, and it is generally found by the woman on her return.

Of course such acts as these are punishable when they are discovered, as many of them are, by the matron; but the ingenuity to deceive is so constant and persistent, that, if every prison officer had the eyes of Argus, the women would still be corresponding.

The rapidity with which news will spread is another remarkable feature of prison life. "Smith has broken out in the old prison," soon gets wind in the east or west wing of Brixton; "Jones is coming back to Pentagon 2, and coir-picking" circulates through the pentagons at Millbank.

Even the news of the day is often current amongst them. Being greedy for intelligence, and ever on the watch for it, they have quick ears to catch a whisper of the matron's; they know who is going to leave, and who will be promoted, as soon as the officers themselves. At school, in the kitchen, in the laundry, at chapel, signs are made and notes exchanged. One matron cannot baffle fifty women determined to have a little talk, or to learn the prison news.

Between those who have not been lucky with their "stiffs," or who are not content with them —or those who cannot write, and so find "stiffs" of no account,—there is a species of talk which is more marvellous than any other kind of free-masonry to which I have alluded.

At Brixton chapel, where one body of wing women is divided by nearly fifty feet from another, a prisoner, in the middle of service, will look across at her pal, and begin to talk *silently* to her. The lips move, the words are evidently pronounced to herself, but not a syllable disturbs the service, or reaches the prison matron near her; and yet the woman in the distance understands all that is

said, and returns a reply in the same manner.

Much study of this mode of correspondence, an accurate acquaintance with the shape of the mouth in forming certain words, and uncommon powers of observation, are all necessary to render this scheme successful. Plans of opposition have been formed, new friendships avowed, old ones broken off or renewed, insults given and received, and news of the prison world circulated extensively by these means; yet in the midst of it all, strict silence, and an apparent attention to the minister's discourse, has been maintained.

At Millbank, by means entirely unaccountable, letters from the women have even found their way to the men's side of the prison. There is also one instance on record of a woman succeeding in communicating with the outer world. This was in the old transportation days, when a boat was accustomed to arrive in the early morning at Millbank stairs, to take the prisoners away to the convict ship waiting for them in the Pool. Although the time of departure had not been communicated to the prisoner I mention, it was discovered by her, and the news forwarded to her

husband—a free man, and I believe an honest one.

The idea is generally entertained that her husband's knowledge was obtained from sources of his own; but it was the woman's triumphant avowal, on board ship, that she was his only informant. Whether right or wrong, certain it is that, when the transport women were crossing from the prison gates to the water side, the guards in attendance were thrust aside by a burly figure, and, before he could be prevented, the husband was hugging in his arms the unfortunate woman whom crime had separated from him. Their meeting was a brief one, and it was not harshly interrupted. Prison matrons, and even prison guards with guns upon their shoulders, have hearts within their breasts, and are as feeling as other men and women, whose duties do not bring them into contact with the offscourings of society. The husband kissed his wife, no rough hand fell too quickly on his shoulder, and there were tears even in the eyes of the guard who warned him to stand back.

Some such incident, lifting us into the world

of feeling, and even carrying us away to the realms of Romance, will occasionally interrupt the monotony of prison life. Fancy, affection, and the better feelings of human nature are sometimes found within the high walls that separate the inmates of a gaol from the busy world without.

As "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy," so there are more things to be wondered at and mourned over in our prisons than even Directors have yet imagined. If the hearts of these prison women could be laid bare, who can say that some story as moving, as interesting, as any ever recounted by poet or novelist, might not be revealed? The matter for a thousand books may be floating amidst the desolate wards that echo to these women's sighs, or ring with their defiance. Theirs have not been quiet lives, and from the elements of life's discord spring the incidents that interest mankind.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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